

THE NEW JUNE

HENRY NEWBOLT

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The New June

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BY

HENRY NEWBOLT

AUTHOR OF 'ADMIRALS ALL,' 'THE OLD COUNTRY,' ETC.

SECOND IMPRESSION

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1909

DEDICATORY LETTER.

*To LADY BELL, of Rounton Grange and
Mount Grace Priory.*

MY DEAR LADY BELL,—

To whom should the writer of this book dedicate it, if not to the owners of Mount Grace, to the feudal Superiors of whom he has himself held the Priory by that easiest of all tenures—the duty of appearing at his lord's dinner-table when his presence is desired? Be graciously pleased then to accept a story which, if it be not the whole, true, and undoubted story of the origin of your famed Carthusian House, is at any rate as near to truth as the union of history and my poor imagination could make it.

You will know what I mean by this; for in our long and (I hope) interminable converse, we have

sometimes spoken of such things. But in case you should happen to see the book in the hands of others, to whom it may be less clear where I am and whither going, let me venture to set down a little note of what you have helped me to see, that you may remember, and bring them also to the same point of view.

First, then, if you should hear any one inquire how far this narrative is history and how far it is fiction, I would beg you to reply that for me there can be no such line of separation drawn between the two. It is, of course, always possible to borrow great names and events from historical records and use them in frankly unhistorical combinations—a good enough device for the amusement of those who come too freshly to the period to be astonished or confused. For me the boundless possibilities of this method rob it of interest; it is too like the game of nursery football—all kicking and no rules. I am restrained too by a perhaps exaggerated respect for those who have once lived the life and borne the names of men. The past is for me no box of puppets: the faces I see in it have eyes; the limbs that stride and dance on my stage are moved, as it seems to me, not by my will but by their own. I write of them not so much to make a story, as to puzzle out a secret. The problem which delights me is this: given cer-

tain facts, to put together the life to which they belonged; given a bone or two, to reconstruct the moving breathing organism.

To conciliate my critics, pray assure them at this point that I am aware of the distinction between artistic and scientific truth: I know the difference, in solidity and permanence, between the authentic material bones and the hypothetical superstructure—not much firmer at times than the stuff that dreams are made of. But I still claim to range myself with the historian, for he too uses *ποίησις*, and he too has his answer for those who demand from him facts and nothing but facts. “You show us modern-looking limbs,” they say,—“limbs unpicturesquely like our own; whereas in the back garden we have found quaint old bones, which are quite different.” These haunters of museums! Will you be able to convince them that the monster never lived whose body was in shape, size, or colour at all identical with his skeleton? Can you persuade them that there was more than the fortuitous grin of the skull in Hamlet’s thought when he sighed, “I knew him, Horatio, a fellow of infinite jest”?

Let us hope so. But even if they will admit a Muse of History, and me among her followers, they may still desire to know what part of my work is genuine osseous remains and what mere *ποίημα*—cheap reconstruction. To that I hope you will

answer gravely that the analyst's report shows a very large proportion of solid matter: that of all the characters in the story, Margaret Ingleby is the only one I have invented, that the History of England has nowhere been tampered with, and that the Heraldry and Genealogy will be found strictly correct. Would that I could stop there! But my love of the game—of the pursuit of truth, of the hunting of Life to earth—drives me to risk all in the hope of gathering a companion or two for the chase. I say then, that when the known facts had all been tabulated, when the Chronicles had been read and criticised, when the account-books, charters, and poems of the period had been ransacked, there still remained the necessity of making one or two inferences of fact, and even of motive, for which I can claim no authority but my own imagination. I can and do plead for that imagination that it was fed on a sound and stimulating diet obtained from Professor Oman's volume of the Political History of England, from Mr William Brown's monograph on Mount Grace, and from a private conversation with my friend Dr William Hunt, which had a strong effect on the direction of the story at the moment of its first stirring into life; but I warn those whom it may concern, that if certain new facts could be discovered, certain inferences disproved, then here and there, in byways of the plot, the

author might, for all his care, be convicted of writing fiction.

In this shameful extremity I hope that you would still find something to say for me. Could you not plead that the poor fellow has at any rate shown a commendable belief in History, in the rational study of rational beings; that he is on the side of humanity against archæology; that he has tried to uphold the continuity of the race, the alliance of past and present against the brute forces of barbarism, the honour of those who fell long ago in the front rank to which we have succeeded? Could you not here call in Professor Gilbert Murray to speak to the jury for me, or Mr Scott-James to remind them of the eternal value of a sense of significance in human life?

But (lastly) I am far from sure that my choice of a subject will commend my book to my contemporaries. My dear friend H. G. Wells, I know, will find my belief in the magic of places absurd, my sympathy with the social ideas of our forefathers "antagonistic." How should the discoverer of Utopia believe in any *place*? How can one who was born in the Future be expected to interest himself in the Past? Yet—you might remind him—there are times (and they come at more and more frequent intervals) when with the courage of genius and the effort of a Superman he rediscovers a part

of the ancient ways; and I think he knows that as I watch him tilting, careering, questing, so high-heartedly and devotedly, up and down the world, I admire in him the paradox of nature by which he is compelled to display the very colours he would disown—to furnish one more example of our best inheritance, of what Maurice Barrès has called in a challenging phrase, “*les dispositions chevaleresques et raisonnables.*”

And now, commending myself and my book to the protection of all your honourable House, I remain always gratefully and faithfully yours,

HENRY NEWBOLT.

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“To be a true historian is to be able to look at the present as if it were the past, and at the past as if it were the present. . . . How unlike the past was to the present, and yet how much of the present there must always have been in the past!”

—Right Hon. JAMES BRYCE.

PART I.

DREAMS OF YOUTH



L

A FLOOD of sunshine was pouring aslant John Marland's room; voices came up from the street below, and the air quivered with a sound of bells. They woke the sleeper, but did not rouse him: the dreams of night passed imperceptibly into the dreams of day, and for some time he lay motionless, looking through half-closed eyes at the bright illimitable world that lay beyond the open square of his latticed window. The still blue radiance of the sky in that spring morning seemed to be an image of the life that lay before him—a clear and formless outlook, without landmarks or boundaries, without even a cloud to chequer it. It was almost too unlimited, too dazzling; John closed his eyes again, and turned back to the more solid picture-book of his childhood and youth, full of vivid scenes: some were in strongly contrasted colours, but all, as he saw now, consistent parts in a pageant of unbroken happiness. He saw the house of Gardenleigh, where he was born, with the steep down behind it and the tranquil mirror of the lake stretching below: on the far side loomed the big oak, under which he used to land for the invasion of France. Up the valley to the left lay his

favourite primrose bank: to-day, in this warm lull of the March wind, the pale stars would be breaking out among the beech-roots; the faint sweet smell of the flowers and the earth floated round him for a moment, and passed as if a light breeze had carried it away again. He saw the day fade in the great gallery where his sisters and he had so often, when dusk brought them indoors to their mother, drawn their little trefoil-headed stools close about her high velvet chair, and asked innumerable questions about their father: they hardly remembered him, but they always thought they did; they knew which of the cold stiff suits of armour had been his, and every year in September they crowned his helm with oak-leaves in honour of Poitiers. With that the scene changed: he remembered now the long ride into Cheshire, when his boyhood ended and he went, as he told himself, from home into the world. The world of Eastwich! that quiet remote northern valley, with its black-and-white timbered Hall, its bitter frozen winters, and the household discipline of old Sir William Mells, almost as cold and hard for the green buds of youth. How his heart shrank when his mother rode away south and left him to it! Well, he was a man now, and had filled his uncle's shoes these six months past: he could afford to smile at the severity of the training, the more whole-heartedly because the old man had been at last so proud of him. Chester and Stafford! those were jousts worthy of the best,

Sir William said: and John had done well there. He had won no prize, but he had suffered no overthrow, and he had learnt both skill and confidence. His blood quickened at the recollection: he felt the eager pawing of the good horse beneath him, and the hot steam of his own breath inside the helm: he heard the muffled blare of the trumpets sounding the *laissez-aller*, and the swift beat of hoofs over the turf: his heart stood still again with the shock of the cope, and leapt again with the triumphant consciousness of his own strength as he passed on undefeated. So it had been, so it should be, and better, at St Inglebert, in the great match of England against France.

He was wide awake now, with little desire left for lying still: his eyes roved round the room as he raised himself on his arm. How warm and bright the sun was, how gaily those bells were ringing! St Inglebert! St Inglebert!—it was an omen surely that to-day, at his first hearing of them, the famous bells of Westminster should be singing to him of St Inglebert. He felt, rather than thought it; but he was certainly a little exalted by the sound and by the spring in his blood, and with the instability of youth fell immediately from that height of fancy to the lowest pitch of his whole meditation: he remembered his new clothes, and remembered them with pleasure.

There they lay upon the settle by the wall, neatly laid out by the silent swift decorum of his servant

while he was still asleep, in readiness for his first day in London, for his entry, this time, into the real world: for to-day, beyond question, he was beginning life. There they lay, and now that the moment was come they gave him, he perceived with relief, exactly the same satisfaction that they had been giving him at intervals ever since the day when he planned and ordered them. His eye dwelt critically but with cool final confidence on the fresh black and silver of the coat: the cut was elaborate without being fantastio, the colours were his own colours, the colours of his shield—they were well suited to the sober dignity of three-and-twenty; they made, as he had thought they would, a dress both modest and distinguished, and he longed to see himself in it among the rest.

He paused there and frowned: a small cloud showed upon the horizon. "Among the rest" was a touch of vanity, and brought its own punishment. Among the rest he would be but a green-horn still, a new-comer from the outside: his colours might please himself, but they would not hide from the rest the uncouthness of his half-fledged quills. Well-dressed, well-born, well-educated, rich, and strong—yes, but none the less without experience of London or the Court. Give him time and he feared nothing—these were only tricks of fashion: but when youth holds the scales fashion weighs down all the virtues, and at the first blush, when every small mistake is a bitter humiliation, how

was his ignorance to carry it off among the rest? The doubt pestered him: it circled round him like a fly, settling again and again on the same spot. If only manners could be learned like morals, from nurses and tutors and good plain country uncles: if only they could be practised, as he had practised his tilting, upon remote and solitary downs like that by Gardenleigh: if only his father's career had not ended suddenly in his own childhood,—but these were old regrets, and the old consolations soon dispersed them once more. After all, he had already taken his place among men, had learned to smile and nod and hold his tongue, to give hard knocks and take harder ones: after all, he knew very well that it was not every young man's luck to start life with two knight's fees for his portion, and the repute of three generations of good soldiers behind him.

So the sun still shone as he sprang out of bed, and the voices in the street sounded like the voices of friends and jolly fellows: and all the time that he was dressing in the black and silver suit, the bells continued their triumphant jangle of St Inglebert, St Inglebert.

II.

IN little more than an hour's time he was riding through the city, attended by the best-looking of his grooms. It grieved him to appear with only one retainer on so important an occasion, but he had felt obliged to leave the others free for the business of packing up: they must be ready to start for France at any moment after his return. As for his own errand, it had about it much of the vagueness, as well as the far-reaching ambition, that marks the plans of youth. It was ambitious to choose the great jousts of St Inglebert for his first appearance, and still more so to think of entering the field in the train of the Earl of Huntingdon, one of the best jousts in England, and half-brother to the King himself. The vagueness lay in the arrangements by which all this was to be brought about. When the news had reached him of the challenge issued by the French champions, he had ordered a new suit of armour and put his horses in training at once: but he had made no other preparation beyond writing to his friend John Savage, a young Cheshire squire in the Earl's service, to ask if he could inform him of the best means of reaching Calais and putting his name down for the contest. Savage, who was only a year or two older than himself, and had much less

time at his own disposal, replied even more briefly that "everyone" was going and that everything would be all right: they were to start on the Feast of Gregory the Great, and if Marland would present himself on that day some time before dinner, he could take the road with them and get the advantage of the Earl's transport service for the crossing. But it was now some months since this invitation had been so lightly given, and Marland had not even troubled to accept it.

By the time the Tower came in sight he began to wish he had been rather more business-like, and the feeling grew stronger as he turned out of Harp Lane and saw the broader expanse of Thames Street to right and left of him. He hesitated for a moment, but a second glance showed him that "The New June," for which he was bound, was almost certainly the great house overlooking the river towards the western end of the street; and as he rode up to it he saw that he was right: the painted shields on either side of the gate bore the three golden lions, with nothing but a narrow bordure of fleurs-de-lis to distinguish them from the royal arms of England.

The sight of so splendid a cognisance, and the sudden apprehension of all that it implied, almost took his breath: in one moment of panic he came to a full understanding of his own careless presumption. But it was too late to draw back: his horse had stopped of itself before the great door,

and the guard had already turned out—two fellows in scarlet with tall bright poleaxes, between whom a smooth-faced porter advanced with an obsequious air.

John Savage was out of town: the Earl was out of town: the Countess was out of town.

Marland could have wrung his neck for the smooth indifference of his tone.

“You know, I suppose, where they are?” he said.

“The Countess is at Dartington; the Earl and all his gentlemen have gone abroad.”

“So I understand,” said John, “but I thought they were to start to-day.”

“They start to-day from Dover.”

The man bowed him out with the same impassive courtesy, and disappeared: John turned moodily from the gateway, signalling to his groom for the horses. The halberdiers watched him with some interest. “A day or two late for the fair,” said one to the other with a nod.

“Aw, early enough,” the fellow replied; “he’ll be in plenty of time for a headache.” He tucked his poleaxe under his arm, like a lance in the rest, and bent over it; then suddenly threw up his head and both hands in the attitude of a knight flung backward from his horse.

John mounted carefully, pretending not to see; but as he rode away he realised sharply that though he had reached the Court, he was still outside it.

III.

AFTER all there was no great harm done: embarrassing as his impudence had been, the man with the poleaxe was quite right. Since the jousting was only to begin on Monday week, and to continue for a full month, there was little fear of being late. It would have been easier for a novice, and pleasanter too, no doubt, to make the journey in company, but for a man with his pockets full of money there could be no difficulty in making it alone. John remembered that all his people were to be ready for the start by midday: nothing was changed on his side, and not one of his arrangements needed to be reconsidered.

In the meantime he had some hours to spend as he pleased. He first rode straight to the Tower, and great as his expectation was, it was in no way disappointed. He had a strong feeling for the romance of history, and here in one long-anticipated moment, as he cleared the eastern end of Thames Street, it seemed to be suddenly embodied before his eyes. The broad moat, running east and north from the angle where he had halted, the long low curtain-walls, the massive river gate beneath, the drawbridges and rounded outworks above—all these, and the picturesque confusion of them, pleased him greatly; but again and again he turned from

them to the central keep that dominated them. As he saw it under the still brightness of the March morning, with the high straight lines of its white quoins and the severe round arches of its far-up windows, shining clear through a faint haze of blue smoke from the buildings below, it seemed to him to be infinitely remote from the splendours and the trivialities of modern times: it was dreaming still of the grim methodical Norman and the long dead century of its first youth. He would have given much to enter; but to be repulsed again, and here, was more than he could risk.

He tore himself away at last and began slowly to ascend the hill. To his left, on the slope of the high green bank above the entrance to Tower Street, stood a gray stone church, surrounded on three sides by a churchyard of unusual extent and beautifully kept: on the south side a finely carved porch with a flight of stone steps came right down upon the street. Here again was antiquity in its most attractive form, and breathing a spirit which had been wanting even to the White Tower; for the music of a psalm, chanted by trained voices without accompaniment, rolled in wave after wave from the chancel and laid a spell like that of memory upon the listener below.

John was fundamentally religious, like the great mass of his fellow-countrymen: he shared, certainly, some of the unorthodox opinions of his age, he had a general tendency to mistrust the clergy, and his

boyhood had been one long rebellion against enforced attendance at church ; but the power of association had all the time been binding him with imperceptible bonds, and since he had been his own master he had come to find a new pleasure in devotions practised when and where he chose. At this moment the choice was not in doubt ; before the alternating roll of the chant had gathered itself into the unison of the *Gloria*, he had slipped from his saddle, climbed the steps, and laid his hand upon the iron latchet of the porch door.

The music ceased, and he entered. The interior of the church was massive and severe, simply an arcade of plain round pillars and a bare open chancel: the first glance traversed it from end to end, and to Marland's great surprise it was entirely empty. But as he advanced into the nave he heard faintly the sound of a voice reciting prayers, and perceived at the same moment a door in the wall of the north aisle. By this, too, he stood listening for a moment, and then opened it quietly during an interval of silence. He had no sooner done so than he stopped short in surprise: he seemed to have passed under some sudden illusion, so striking was the change from the monastic bareness of the church itself to the dim, rich splendour of the chapel in which he now stood. The roof was of white stone, and vaulted plainly after the Norman fashion, but the arch was lofty and graceful; the walls were covered with frescoes, and the

roundheaded windows of the original style had been replaced by longer pointed lights filled with exquisite stained armorial glass: those at the east end were deeply recessed behind slender groups of detached pillars, rising at the head into quadruple mouldings of great beauty. The altar itself was invisible, behind the Lenten Veil; but from the altar steps westwards the little building was pannelled with the finest carved woodwork, now dark with age; and John saw as he glanced quickly to right and left of the door by which he stood, that the choir stalls, elaborate as they were, bore no comparison with the magnificence of those at the west end, which had lofty canopies, relieved with gold, and were furnished with gilt sconces and with cushions and footstools of the richest crimson velvet.

To-day the canopies were all unoccupied, but they seemed hardly to offer a seat to a chance visitor. On the other hand the nearest choir-stall was vacant, and one of the clerks made a sign of invitation. John took the place and began to look about him. The sense of splendour was heightened as his eye dwelt upon every detail in turn, and he was not unprepared for the discovery which he presently made, that the two central canopies facing the altar were inlaid with small plates of gold, on which the royal arms of England were enamelled in colours. No wonder the chapel was splendid, since it was evidently King Richard's own; but the pride of youth was hardly abashed by this

reflection, and in a few moments the remembrance of his own birth and possessions was stirring John's thoughts to emulation, or at least to imitation, of his sovereign lord's magnificence: he resolved to enrich his own two churches by the addition of stained-glass windows, and decided that his own seats should be furnished with velvet. Perhaps, however, crimson was not the most suitable colour: he had a sense of proportion, and besides, he liked his sumptuousness to be visible at the second glance rather than the first: it seemed to him to make just the difference between ostentation and good taste. To be splendid for himself and those who could find him out—that was his desire, and he revelled in it, only mechanically sharing in the service which was going on around him.

But presently his reverie was dispersed and he found his eyes riveted upon a face opposite to him. It was that of one of the singing men, a tall, dark, handsome fellow, who sang with a concentration that marked him off from the rest, and whose features, when in repose, had an expression of very uncommon power and a kind of sad serenity. Clearly, as John saw, not the face of a man of his own class: it was too thin, too clever, too intent upon the work in hand: yet, whether he approved or no, he was held by the grip of a personality which, he had enough insight to suspect, was a rarer and a stronger one than his own. The man was older than himself, and his

thoughts had probably nothing in common with those of a landed gentleman: but there were thoughts there, and John found himself again and again coming back to wonder what they were. The mere surmise of them was keeping two interesting churches out of window-glass and velvet hassocks.

IV.

WHEN the service was over and the procession left the chapel, John followed the bidding of a curiosity that refused to depart unsatisfied. He paced slowly up and down the church, keeping watch while the priest and choristers returned by ones and twos from the vestry and hurried out of the building. The tall dark man came nearly last, and there was no one with him: he was dressed very plainly, with a weather-beaten cloak of dark grey hanging from rather round shoulders, and he carried in his hand a bonnet of cloth which had once been blue. Poor he evidently was, but of a class outside John's experience: for he seemed to have nothing about him of the noble, military, clerical, rustic, or servile elements of society. Presumably he was akin to the clerical, but there was an outdoor swing in his walk, and a turn of his head, that spoke of freedom and even of reckless-

ness. He showed no surprise at seeing Marland directly in his path and evidently about to speak with him.

"You are looking for me, sir?" he asked.

"No," replied John, astonished at being spoken to first; "not originally, I mean. I came here . . . for a different reason." The other looked straight at him with a smile of intelligence. "So did I," he said; "we are both disappointed." John was still more surprised: the tone was courteous, but it might have been that of an equal.

"I do not understand you," he replied more firmly; "what is it that you and I have in common?"

"Speech," said the other.

"If that is all" . . . said John, reddening at the check.

"No," replied the stranger, "we both had hope."

"Hope?"

"To see the king."

John looked instinctively towards the door of the chapel: this man's voice had made the words so living that he felt himself for an instant almost in the Presence. The moment passed, and he turned back to his companion.

"But I came here by chance," he said.

"Then I am wrong," replied the other, "and sorry for it." He moved as though to take his leave.

"Why are you sorry?" asked John, "and what did you expect of me?"

The straight look met him again. "I no longer

expect, but I always hope. I watch them come in shoals to the net: all young, all supple and shining,"—he seemed to glance at the new suit,—“but common herring every one—nothing big among them—so far.”

John began to catch his meaning. “If you thought I had newly come to Court, you were not so wrong: only if I am to serve any one, it is not the king, but his brother.”

“Ah!” said the stranger, looking thoughtfully at him but speaking almost to himself. “A hard roe, not a soft one, this time: but are they not all the king’s—every fish in the four seas?”

“Certainly I am the king’s, if he will take me.” John’s head went up.

“Ay!” cried his companion suddenly with a kind of poetic fervour that embarrassed John but held him fast. “One more silver belly, if the net will take it! But where among all these is the dolphin for the day of shipwreck? It is smooth sailing now and pretty sport with the glittering little lords; but when the squall comes, which of them will carry the king ashore? I go up and down England looking for a man: I find none, there or here: Hollands and Mowbrays, Rutlands and Scropes, they take their pastime between their sleep, and their sleep between their pastimes, like the gay figures on a clock, whose only sign of life is to come out when every hour strikes, and ride their little round without change or meaning.”

The tone was sad rather than angry, but John felt a bitterness in it that twisted his own tongue.

"A passage of arms means nothing to a clerk," he said, "but it means a good deal to a soldier."

"I have seen war," said the other, "and I shall see it again; but for what war do these lords train themselves? When they have spent the treasure their fathers won in France, they will seek more in England: when they have plundered the poor, they will scheme to sack each other: they live by getting wealth, not by making it."

"You don't touch me there," replied John with satisfaction. "My property is my own, well got and well kept: I do my duty to my people, and I will do my duty to the king when my time comes."

"Will you?" cried the other eagerly; "will you swear it? Come!" He turned towards the door of the royal chapel, which the sacristan was preparing to lock, and John followed him almost against his own will. He had the shamefacedness and conventionality of his age, but there were no witnesses here, and the stranger carried him away by the touch of romance he mingled with his earnestness.

They passed quickly and without a word up the length of the chapel, and stopped immediately under the Lenten Veil. The singing-man bent down and with great reverence pushed back the lower edge of the drapery: in the pavement close before the altar John saw a plain stone with a large Crusader's cross

upon it, and in the centre of the cross a heart: to right and left were carved in bold letters the words, *Cor Ricardi Cor Leonis*.

"What is a king?" said the stranger in a low voice; "what but a sunrise and a sunset: a day in the life of a great nation. The Lion's Heart was a king once: but with him it has been night these two hundred years. It is morning still with our Lord Richard, — morning with the dew upon it: there has been no such promise yet in any kingdom under the rainbow roof."

He spoke passionately, and John began to feel an answering emotion: he had been bred in the chief centre of English loyalty, where the king was always right, always adored. His companion laid a hand upon his shoulder, and he did not resent it. Then the stranger fell upon his knees, drawing John down with him.

"Make your vow here," he said, "that in whatever company you may be, henceforth so long as you and the king shall both live, never will you take rest by night or by day without this prayer first spoken aloud, 'God save Richard, King of England.'"

John, with his eyes upon the stone heart below, took the vow willingly enough: it was the first time he had ever done such a thing, but he had heard the like of Chandos and Audley and other heroes of the past. For a moment longer he remained kneeling, to collect his thoughts. When

he rose he became aware that his companion had left him, and was striding rapidly down the aisle.

He followed more slowly, and when he reached the door found the church entirely deserted, except by the sacristan, who was still waiting patiently with the keys. He gave the old man a piece of money, and asked him who was that who had just gone out.

"We take him for his voice, sir, and he comes and goes as he likes. My lord the king has been pleased to notice him for his voice, and it is likely that sets him up a little, but he is an innocent creature, sir."

John frowned: the apology seemed inappropriate. "But who is he?" he asked, rather peremptorily.

"We call him William, sir, but I don't know if that be his name. He is quite harmless, sir, you understand."

Outside the horses were waiting: John rode away at a sharp pace, and was glad to be in the sunshine again, but his horizon seemed hardly so unclouded now. He felt as if he had something to forget.

V.

JOHN made his journey slowly: he could not bring himself to part company with his baggage, for it contained, among other valuables, the armour which had cost so much and upon which so much depended. He slept at Dartford, Sittingbourne, and Canterbury; crossed early on the fourth day, and was in Calais before noon. His friend John Savage was expecting him, for he had sent an express messenger in advance, and every preparation had been made for putting up his men and horses: he himself was to share the house in which his friend and another squire were already lodged, close to the citadel where their master, the Earl of Huntingdon, was staying with Lord Nottingham, the Captain of Calais. Dinner was ready, and Savage proposed that they should go to table at once without waiting for the other partner, who was late in returning from the training-ground.

"I don't think you know Roger Swynnerton," he said, "but I can assure you that you won't find his equal among the squires here: the fact is, that he is too good and too experienced to be a squire at all. He's as old as Huntingdon himself, and, man for man, his equal in every way."

"How is it," Marland asked, "that he has had to wait so long for promotion?"

"No money," Savage replied, in the light tone of a man of the world; "he is the son of a younger son."

"I wonder the Earl took him."

"He is a sort of relation, you see; his uncle, old Sir Thomas Swynnerton, married Huntingdon's aunt."

Marland laughed. "I don't quite follow the relationship," he said; "but since the Earl does, I should have thought he might provide for his kinsman."

"Well," replied Savage, "he has done what he could; he has suggested one or two good matches to him, but Swynnerton is obstinate, he prefers to choose for himself."

John nodded approval. "By the way," he said, "I thought I remembered the name: wasn't there a lady—a certain Maud Swynnerton—that you used to think a good deal about?"

Savage avoided his eyes. "You need not say 'used,'" he replied in a warning tone.

John took the hint. "I am glad to hear it," he said cordially; "tell me more."

"She is married," replied Savage, still with averted looks.

John had many ideas about love, but no experience. He saw that his friend was suffering, but had no salve for him beyond mere commonplace.

"My dear fellow," he began, "a woman's choice——"

"There is no woman's choice in the question,"

Savage interrupted; "she was married against her will—carried off by that old brute, Sir William Ipstones, and married by force to his own son, a mere boy, younger than herself."

"By force!" exclaimed John. "But what were her family doing to allow it?"

"She has no family: she was Sir Robert's only child, and he is dead. That is the whole point of it: she is sole heiress of the Swynnerton property."

"And what does your friend Roger say—he is her cousin, I suppose?"

"He says nothing—and he is quite right; there is nothing to be said for the present. The marriage is a hollow affair, by all accounts; young Ipstones is a boy and a weakling; if he lives to grow up I will call him to a reckoning one way or another."

The tone was resolute enough, but the plan seemed a little vague. "I suppose Swynnerton is backing you?" he said.

"He is not his own master," replied Savage, "but when the time comes he will need no persuading. You don't know Roger; he never lets go when he has once set his teeth. Besides, I am helping him in his own business."

"Is his business of the same kind as yours?"

"Worse—the lady is even more unhappy. You must have heard of the beautiful Joan Hastings, who married Sir John Salusbury? He was persecuted to death by Gloucester and his gang for being too loyal, and Joan, instead of waiting for

Roger, has thrown herself away on a Frenchman named Rustine de Villeneuve. Of course she is miserable."

"There again," said John, "I suppose there is nothing to be done for the present?"

"For the present! for the present! how did we come to talk of these things?" cried Savage, rising abruptly and going over to the window. John looked after him very sympathetically, and with a glow of chivalrous enthusiasm. If anything could have heightened his esteem for these two friends, from whom he hoped so much, it would have been their devotion to their distressed ladies: his mind was full of knightly challenges and deeds of arms, in which he himself was to play a secondary but very honourable part.

Savage turned back to him from the window. "Look here," he said, "we must have no more of this; we have a stiff day's work in hand over here, and we must go through with it. Don't let Roger know I have told you anything, and don't speak of either affair again until we are back in England."

John held out his hand and gave his friend a reassuring grip.

"You can't forbid my thinking," he said; "I shall always be trying to devise a way out."

"The way out—there are only two possible," muttered the other.

"What are they?"

"Oh! death and divorce, I suppose," replied

Savage sullenly, and as he spoke them John thought he had never heard two uglier words. He was relieved to hear a cheerful loud voice approaching. The door opened, and Roger Swynner-ton entered the room.

VI.

THE new-comer gave Marland a friendly greeting and sat down opposite to him. There was a short break in the conversation while the servant placed fresh dishes upon the table, and John spent the time in noting the marked contrast between his two companions. Savage was of his own age: he was ruddy, active, and well knit, but rather small made and fine for a man of arms; his jet black moustache and closely-cropped hair made his face somewhat conventional in type, but gave him what he most desired, an undeniably military appearance; his spirits were usually high, his manner vivacious, and even jaunty. Roger, on the other hand, was a set thick figure of much heavier weight, and with no grace but that of strength; his features were blunt, and seemed more so from the entire absence of hair from the face; the contours were muscular and firm, and both forehead and jaw unusually massive. His eyes were frank and kindly

as he spoke to John, and his voice had a manly matter-of-fact tone in it, but there was something forbidding in the lines of determination about the mouth: he was no stripling at the beginning of his career, but a soldier of thirty-six, who had long been hard put to it to keep pace with his wealthier companions, and it seemed by his appearance that he had thrown aside in the race a good deal of the poetry with which youth delights to deck itself at the start.

For some time he paid undivided attention to his dinner, and the meal ended without his having contributed more than a word here and there to the conversation. He then filled a small cup of wine for himself and each of his companions, and leaned back in his chair.

"We are in strict training," he explained as he pushed the wine-flagon farther away, "and we need to be. I hope you have come prepared to join us?"

John replied with as little eagerness as possible that he was there for that purpose.

"You have run before?" asked Swynnerton. "I don't mean in practice, of course."

"Oh yes," replied John, "twice—at Chester and Stafford."

Swynnerton looked him over with a cool scrutiny that was hard to face without embarrassment.

"I daresay you did pretty well there," he said as his eyes came up to the level of John's; "but it will

be much hotter work here. What's your armour like?"

"Milanese," replied John in a fine offhand tone, and then spoiled the effect by adding, "and brand new."

"Right! and the horses? You mustn't mind my asking questions."

"Not at all," replied John. "I have brought two chargers: one is a bit hard-mouthed, but neither of them ever refuses."

Swynnerton nodded. "We'll look at them tomorrow," he said. "It is the only day you will have for galloping, I'm afraid. Thursday we are to practise the grand parade, and again on Saturday. Sunday must be a day off for every one."

He finished his wine, rose a little stiffly, and stretched himself. "I must be going," he said to John, "but we've plenty of time before us." He gave him another nod of approval and went noisily down the stairs.

"Now," said Savage when they were left alone, "I'll show you your quarters, and you shall show me the Milanese harness."

VII.

THE trials came off successfully next day upon a training-ground outside the walls of the town; but they were not so easily accomplished as Marland had expected. He was quite unprepared for the immense crowd of would-be competitors, and spent a somewhat discontented morning waiting in vain for his turn in the enclosure, which had been measured and fenced in to represent the lists. Though the three French champions were to hold the field for thirty days, and the Earl of Huntingdon's party was probably by no means the only one which would take up the challenge during that time, there were already more than sixty knights and gentlemen in Calais, and on this, the last day of serious practising, they and their grooms, with chargers and hackneys, covered the downs in every direction, and almost choked the streets of the town.

By Savage's advice John went back early to dinner, and returned at a time when the ground was comparatively clear. Horses and armour both proved to be in satisfactory condition, and he was about to make his way home for the day when two horsemen, magnificently mounted, and followed by a dozen others, overtook and passed him at a canter. One of the party was Swynnerton: he

made a peremptory gesture as he went by, and pointed to the two figures in front.

"They are going to make up the list," he explained when John drew level. "I'll try and find the moment to present you."

"Who is the other?" asked Marland.

"The Earl Marshal: the man nearest him is Baskerville, his cousin and chief squire, and the next one is Stamer, a kinsman of Huntingdon's just knighted."

John's heart beat: he felt as though he were already one of a splendid fellowship. Ten minutes afterwards he found himself following Swynnerton into the great chamber of the castle where the two Earls were to hold their council of war. They were talking together by the fire, and the squires remained at a respectful distance just inside the door, Swynnerton alert but with a well-trained air of indifference, John with eyes fixed openly on the great men. He had seen earls before, but these were famous jousts of almost royal rank, and he was prepared to admire without reserve. It was disappointing that at first sight both appeared to fall short of his ideal: Nottingham had the high-bred manner to be expected of a Mowbray, but his face was young and lacking in character; Huntingdon, on the other hand, though of a much stronger type, had a coarse look about his heavy eyes, and the corners of his mouth were drawn with a permanent curve of unmeasured, and even ferocious,

pride. Still, he was grandly built, and moved with a grand air,—a fine figure, John thought to himself, but an uncongenial master to serve. Perhaps he hardly showed to advantage at this moment, for he was clearly impatient.

“Swynnerton,” he said presently, “are these fellows ever coming?”

“It is hardly the hour yet,” replied the squire with the self-possession of a confidential servant. “In the meantime, my lord, may I present to you my friend John Marland, who has come to offer his service to your lordship?”

The Earl looked at John, but did not acknowledge his bow.

“Well, Roger,” he said as he turned his shoulder again, “I suppose you know your business: you generally do.”

Nottingham saw John’s flaming cheeks. “Marland?” he asked courteously. “I think I know that name: where do you come from, sir?”

“Cheshire, my lord,” replied John, swallowing humiliation and gratitude together.

“There is no county more loyal,” said Nottingham gravely, and Huntingdon himself half relaxed his frown and gave John another look over his shoulder.

At this moment the door opened and Savage appeared, ushering in Lord Clifford, Sir Piers Courtenay, Sir John Golafre, and several other knights, all of whom took their places at the

long table: at the head of it sat the two earls side by side. Swynnerton stood at his master's right shoulder, and William Baskerville on the Earl Marshal's left; next to him was a herald with pen and inkhorn ready, and a list of names in his hand. No one took the least notice of Marland, who remained standing like one petrified, till Savage drew him down to a place by his own side on a settle near the door, and reassured him by a wink and a smile.

There was a buzz of conversation, which ceased suddenly when the Earl Marshal rapped upon the bare table. "My lords," he said, looking down at a memorandum handed to him by the herald, "our paper of agenda is not a long one; but I think you will agree with me that it is time we made out some kind of order for this contest."

"And remember," added Huntingdon brusquely, "that we are here to win, not to take riding lessons."

"My lord means," said Nottingham, "that we have no time to waste over rockets and boys' games: we are over here for serious business, and whoever runs must be prepared to run with sharp points and in war harness. I take it that we shall all be of one mind about that."

There was a general murmur of assent, but Huntingdon was not to be explained away.

"Spears, of course," he said scornfully, "that goes without saying; but I meant that these

Frenchmen have defied us, and it is for us to see that they pay for it."

Courtenay murmured something short to his neighbour. "My lord," he said aloud to the Earl Marshal, "I have not seen the terms of the challenge lately, but I understand it to be a general one to gentlemen of all nations."

"That won't do," said Huntingdon; "the field is pitched on our frontier."

"I think," said the Earl Marshal, "it must be allowed that the match is practically England against France. I have been asked to preside to-day on that understanding."

"And I am here," added Huntingdon, "in the place of the king, my brother."

A silence followed, during which Savage kicked John carefully, and caught his eye.

"Well, now," continued Huntingdon in a more genial tone, "the Earl Marshal will no doubt settle the list presently and arrange the order of precedence. What I want to hear discussed is the plan of campaign. The challengers leave it open to every one to take his choice between the three of them; but so far as my own company is concerned, I must know beforehand whom they intend to call out."

There was some demur to this autocratic proposal, but it was supported by the Earl Marshal.

"We must remember," he said, "that though we have three good jousts to deal with, one

of them is far more formidable than the others. We must pick our best men to run against Reynault de Roye—men who can face even a— a possible reverse.”

“Or else,” said Huntingdon, “put out all our strength against Boucicaut and Sempy, and leave only the weaklings to de Roye: in that way we shall probably make sure of defeating two of them, and give the third nothing to boast about.”

A moment of consternation followed this un-knightly proposal, but it was quickly dispelled by the deep voice of Sir John Golafre, the biggest man in the room. “My lord,” he said, “if the noble Earl’s ingenious suggestion is adopted, may I beg that you will put me down as first weakling?”

Again Savage winked at John, who drew a breath of relief that was almost a sob. Smiles of discreet approval were passing between the knights at the table, and Huntingdon was looking round in vain for some one to second him.

“What do you say, Courtenay?” he asked. Sir Piers was his neighbour in Devonshire, and the most famous champion present. But he was at once too chivalrous and too diplomatic to fall into the Earl’s snare.

“I say, my lord, that in my experience no one is irresistible—there is a deal of chance in these affairs: you may tumble to a Sempy, and yet have the luck to bring down a de Roye. I propose to try them all three: I should count myself beaten

by any man I dared not meet, and, as you say, we are here to win."

After some further discussion, too confused for John to hear very much of it, the Earl Marshal took the sense of the meeting, and Lord Huntingdon's proposal was lost. A compromise was then agreed upon; the choice of antagonists was to be left open according to the usual practice, but the names of nine first-rate jousts were definitely entered to run some or all of their courses against de Roye, three of them on each of the first three days. The herald then read the list aloud: at the head of the nine came the Earl Marshal, followed by seven knights and one squire—Roger Swynnerton—but to John's astonishment the name of the Earl of Huntingdon was not amongst them. He looked round at Savage with an indignant question written on every feature of his face, but Savage was already holding the door open for the departing council.

VIII.

THE Earl passed out last, and Swynnerton with him: the two young squires were left alone together.

Savage closed the door carefully, and turned to his companion: he looked puzzled, but showed none of the indignation that was disturbing Marland.

"Strange folk, our masters," he said with an uncertain eye on John.

"Your master," replied John, "never mine."

"I was afraid you might say that; but you must not judge too soon. He has some reason for shirking de Roye: it can't be from any softness, for he is hard to the core,—his friends and enemies are all at one about that."

"But he planned for us to shirk too," growled John.

"Oh!" said Savage airily, "the devil take his plans: he's a bit too keen, that's all. I'm going for de Roye myself, but you needn't tell him so."

John's eye kindled. "Good man!" he said, "so am I—with every spear I have."

They shook hands on it. At that moment the door opened, and Swynnerton reappeared upon the threshold: to John's eye he seemed taller and of a more dignified carriage since the reading of that list, but the change was apparently not visible to Savage, who spoke to him in his usual light tone.

"Does he want me, Roger?"

"No," replied the other; "he has gone to supper with Clifford. But what were you two shaking hands about?"

"Agreeing to do my lord's duty for him and try de Roye."

"What good do you expect to get by that?"

Savage raised his chin. "We shall cover ourselves with glory," he replied.

"With dust, you mean," retorted the elder man.

"I hope," John was beginning deferentially,—*"I hope you don't think——"*

Swynnerton looked disapprovingly at them both. *"I wish you were not so young, you two,"* he said, and turned away as if to go. But before they could move he had changed his mind and was facing them again.

"Look here," he said in a frank but peremptory tone. *"I am going to tell you exactly what I do think. I don't approve of Huntingdon's plan, and I told him so at once when he first broached it: I don't believe in dodges—the man who rides hardest is the man for me. It is quite right for you young ones to take your risks, and I like to see you do it; but it is no business of yours to make rules and judge your betters by them. My lord is here as our captain: he is to open the game, and it won't do for him to lead off with a stumble, or any chance of one. We should have others going after him, like palings when a rot sets in, and in any case it would certainly put heart into the Frenchmen. It is all settled: Huntingdon will take Boucicaut—Boucicaut's own people think a good deal more of him than you do—and Nottingham will follow with de Roye. That's the order of the day, and if you are decent fellows you'll take my view of it and do all you can to see that others do the same."*

He looked them both squarely in the face and then went out with a heavy deliberate step.

"Quite a long speech for old Roger," said Savage. "He doesn't altogether convince me, but I suppose we must do as he says."

"It seems hard to expect us to preach an opinion we don't hold," said John, "but if you think it your duty I suppose it must be mine." He spoke argumentatively, but Savage saw nothing to argue about.

"That's it," he replied cheerfully; "Roger backs Huntingdon, I back Roger, and you back me. You serve my lord after all, you see."

"No nearer than that, thank you."

"Well, don't look so serious over it," said Savage, and carried him off to supper.

IX.

By Saturday afternoon all preparations were complete: the grand entry had been successfully rehearsed in full dress, and nothing now remained to think about except a possible change in the weather, of which there was at present no sign. Daylight was fading slowly in a clear sky as John sat in the window of his lodging. He was alone, for both his friends were away on duty, and after several hours out in the keen March air the warmth of the room was beginning to take drowsy effect

upon him. His eyes felt as though the Dusty Miller of his childhood had been powdering them with both hands, his chin was sinking imperceptibly towards his chest. He was not yet asleep; but of the fulness of life, past, present, and future, nothing was left to him but a deep dim sense of animal comfort.

"John! John! O-ho! John!"

Through this twilight world the eager young voice rang as clearly as a trumpet. John's mind awoke, but not his body: he remained motionless, wondering where he was and who was calling him.

"John?" The voice fell to a question this time, and was certainly now in the room. He opened his eyes and saw the figure of a boy of fifteen, tall and fair, standing with one foot forward as if suddenly checked in his impetuous entry: the pale sunset light met him full face, and seemed to baffle his eagerness as he peered at the sleeper beneath the window.

Marland rose. Something unfamiliar in the movement evidently struck the visitor, for he turned, as if for support, towards the open door, where at this moment a second figure appeared. This, too, was a boy, some three years younger than the other: he halted quietly on the threshold, put his hands in his pockets, and watched the scene without a word.

"I say," exclaimed the elder of the two, "this is some one else. I beg your pardon," he said, turning to Marland; "I thought you were John."

"I am John," replied Marland, "but apparently not the right one. If you want John Savage, he will be here directly. You had better wait."

"May I? Thanks," said the boy in the short eager manner that seemed to match his pointed chin and bright eyes. "Come in, Edmund, and shut the door. My brother's rather slack," he added apologetically, taking a seat upon the table, from which his legs swung restlessly as he talked. The younger boy closed the door and came slowly forward: he was silent, but quite unembarrassed, and stood leaning against the table by his brother's side, looking with large brown eyes at John.

It was clear from the manners of the two that they were unaccustomed to meet with rebuffs. Their dress, too, indicated rank; but John had no idea who they could be.

"Where are you staying?" he asked.

"At the Castle. We've just come. My uncle's there, you know."

John put two and two together. "Is your uncle the Earl of Huntingdon?"

"That's right," the boy nodded. "Do you know him?"

"I do." Unconsciously John's voice took an independent tone as he answered this question. The change was not lost on quick young ears.

"I say," exclaimed the questioner, 'are you a lord?'

"Oh no; only a squire."

"Who's your master?"

"I haven't one."

"I see. Well, if I were you, I wouldn't come to uncle John."

"I am only with him for the jousts," replied Marland, longing to hear more on this subject. But the boy was looking round the room, where along the wall the armour of the occupants was carefully ranged on wooden stands. The three shields, newly painted in silver and black, seemed to attract him especially.

"This is Savage's, with the six lions rampant," he said. "I should always know that, because it's like William Longsword's; and the big cross is Roger's; and this is yours—with a bend and three lions' heads of sable. I say, why are they all three the same colours? Are you relations? Are you all in mourning?"

John smiled at the crackle of questions.

"In our part of the country," he replied, "there are a great many coats of black and silver."

"What name does this one belong to?"

"Mells of Eastwich."

"Oh! John Mells: that's rather a short kind of name, isn't it?"

"It is not my name; I am John Marland."

The boy was mystified, as John intended he should be.

"But you said Mells," he began in a tone of remonstrance.

His brother here opened his lips for the first

time, and gave his opinion deliberately, with a slight stammer.

"Tom, you're a b-bat."

"Shut up, Edmund, you stammering young cuckoo," said the elder boy; but Edmund went on unperturbed, his eyes fixed on John with romantic admiration—

"C-can't you see he killed Mells in a fight, and took his c-coat?"

"Not so bad as that," said John; "but Mells is dead, and I have inherited his lands."

Tom pounced again. "Then you had another coat for Marland?"

"Yes," John replied. "It is wavy gules and silver, with seven marlions of sable."

"I like that better," said Tom. "I love scarlet; I shall have scarlet myself when I'm a knight. Shall you be a knight?"

"Some day, perhaps," replied John, "if I am not killed first."

"I'll tell you what," said the boy, "if you like fighting you'd better come with me; I shall be wanting a squire."

"When will that be?" asked John, concealing his amusement.

"When my father chooses," replied Tom; "he can always get anything out of uncle Richard."

Voices were heard on the stairs; the younger boy gave his brother a warning look. "N-Nicholas!" he said.

Tom explained to Marland: "It is only Nicholas Love; he teaches us Latin and French, and Psalms, and blazonry, and the kings of England."

"And p-poetry," added Edmund.

Nicholas came in with Savage, whom he had met outside. In the brief moment of a formal greeting, and beneath the fast falling twilight, he loomed but vaguely in John's eyes; a dignified and solid form—unusually solid for a man of thirty, and made more bulky by the thick white Carthusian habit which hung without a seam from his chin down to his feet.

"My young friends," he said presently to the boys, who were busy with Savage, "you have my leave to retire." He spoke with a noticeable turn of dry humour, evidently habitual with him.

The young friends seemed to be in no hurry. "We can't go yet," they said.

"I respect your scruples," replied Nicholas, "but you will probably be less missed than you suppose. I hope," he added, turning to John, "that they leave nothing owing?"

"I cannot quite say that," replied John, laughing; "there are my wages from my Lord Thomas."

"He is going to be my body squire," explained Tom, as his brother pushed him through the doorway. "You see, Nicholas, I like him."

"Get on, g-grab-all!" said Edmund.

X.

MONDAY, the twenty-first of March, dawned at last. Early in the morning, though not so early as they had intended, the Earls of Nottingham and Huntingdon left the gates of Calais at the head of a large and confused company of horsemen. A short distance outside the walls they halted, called over the roll of names, and marshalled their following in two orderly columns. Of these the first was much the larger, and contained the armourers, grooms, and spare horses; the second was composed of the combatants and other gentlemen of rank, riding on a narrower front to make the more imposing show.

The spot which had been chosen for the encounter was a level extent of plain, about half-way between Calais and the Abbey of St Inglebert, where the three challengers had their headquarters. The ground, however, was as new to them as to their opponents, for their training had all been done at Boulogne, and the lists had been prepared independently by the two judges, the Earl of Northumberland on one side and on the other the famous Jean de la Personne, known invariably throughout France by the name of Lancelot.

When the barriers were reached, the leading column halted and parted to right and left, making

a long lane down which passed the more splendid company, in order to take the place of honour in the grand entry. The Earl of Huntingdon entered first, riding between the Earl Marshal and Lord Clifford; they were preceded by six trumpeters sounding a challenge, and followed by six body-squires in their liveries. After them came the other combatants, eighteen knights in one company and eighteen squires in another, each man in full armour, bearing his own arms and colours, and with his body-servant in attendance, unarmed, but even more brilliantly appavelled. Last came a troop of distinguished spectators, some twenty in number, who, though unable for various good reasons to play the game themselves, found it worth their while to come from England in great state to assist their friends with advice and applause. Some of them indeed were men of vast experience, and, though they never rode in a match, had been present at every first-class meeting for twenty years past: all were dressed with a splendour worthy of the privileged enclosure from which they were to view the contest.

The whole cavalcade made the tour of the lists from left to right at a walking pace, and John, as he passed in his turn through the barriers and saw the whole pageant before him at a glance, felt that only the voice of trumpets could express the triumph that was rioting through his heart. The pangs of doubt and disappointment, sharp enough at the time,

which had troubled him more than once since he heard the Westminster bells, were now forgotten utterly, as though they had been but thorn pricks; to-day and here, as he saw the procession winding round the long curve of the lists ahead of him, the figures of the two Earls seemed the embodiment of dignity and stately courage, and he felt that he could follow them anywhere.

At this moment the trumpeters were wheeling round to approach the spectators' balcony on the far side: it was hung with blue and gold cloth, and surmounted by the lilies of France, but was at present empty. John's eyes instinctively turned from this to the left-hand side of the ground, which it faced, and he found that he was on the point of passing before the quarters of the challengers. Their three pavilions were all of crimson, but each was distinguished by the device of its owner, embroidered in large letters on a golden scroll. That of Boucicaut, which was close to him, bore the words "*Ce que vous voudrez*,"—a motto which the young champion had but newly chosen, but which he ever afterwards retained in memory of St Inglebert.

After passing the pavilions, and the crowd of gaily dressed French gentlemen drawn up between them, John found himself abreast of a huge elm-tree, which had been purposely included in the circuit of the high outer fence. On the wide-spreading branches near the ground were hung the shields

of the three challengers: of these there were six, one set painted with their owners' arms as in ordinary warfare, the other set also in the owners' different colours, but all three with the same impress—three hearts, two above and one below,—a bearing specially devised for this occasion. Beside each shield five spears were ranged: those by the shields of war had sharp steel points, those by the shields of peace were tipped with rockets or blunt heads, shaped like coronets. At the end of the nearest branch hung a golden horn, and as John marked this unusual item of the ceremonial furniture he felt that it added the last touch of romance to the most chivalrous contest of the age.

By this time the leaders had completed their circuit, and were taking possession of the enclosure allotted to their party, near the gate by which they had entered: the servants were crowding into the space which the procession had just traversed, between the inner rail and the high outer fence. From the centre of the balcony a herald cried aloud the terms of the challenge to all comers, and ended by declaring the lists open in the name of God and St Denis.

Before the last note of the trumpet had died away the English ranks opened, and the Earl of Huntingdon was seen advancing towards the pavilions, followed by two squires bearing his shield and helm. He rode with a slow, majestic pace, and to the onlookers it seemed long before he reached the

great tree and took the horn in his mailed right hand. A loud and fierce blast followed, caught up and redoubled by a tremendous cheer from every Englishman on the ground. The French cheered in return, and the noise continued for some minutes while the Earl's helm was being buckled on by his attendant squires. He then with a light rod touched the war shield of Boucicaut, and a fresh burst of cheering drowned the voice of the herald who was crying to summon that champion forth from his pavilion.

The call was quickly passed on, and Boucicaut appeared in full armour and with helm already fastened. He took his place at the far end of the lists, and John, from where he sat in his saddle directly behind Huntingdon, fixed his eyes like one fascinated upon the red eagle on the young Frenchman's silver shield. With the first note of the trumpet he saw it begin to move: nearer and nearer it came, the long bright lance gleaming above it; a sudden shock, a noise of splintering wood, and the two riders had passed one another, and were trying to rein in their excited chargers. The red eagle came on within a few yards of John, turned gracefully, and went back up the ground: at the far end Huntingdon also was wheeling, while his squires were examining the fragments of his shield, which had been completely pierced and broken by his opponent's spear.

It occurred to John that it was not a very

fortunate omen for the lions of England to be thus defaced at the first onset, but he joined in the cheer which greeted the announcement that the Earl himself was uninjured, the spear having glanced harmlessly over his arm. Again he watched the red eagle, this time without such tense anxiety: the course was uneventful, and his hopes rose. But at the third attack both the chargers refused to cope, and a murmur of disappointment went round.

The Earl came to his place, and made ready to start again. He was hot and angry, and could be heard swearing under his impassive mask of iron. His anger turned to fury when he saw that Boucicaut was returning to his pavilion: no reason was offered for this withdrawal, but none was really needed, for the judges had announced that no challenger was under obligation to run more than three courses against any one opponent. Huntingdon, however, was beside himself with rage, and so far lost his head as to roar out a boastful and violent order to one of his squires to strike the shield of Sempy, the least formidable of the French party.

The French, however,—if they heard it,—had the good taste to ignore this breach of manners, and Sempy responded without delay. The first course was a failure, the horses crossing before they met: in the confused shock which followed, Huntingdon was unhelmed, more by accident than design. When he returned to his place to be re-armed Swynnerton moved forward as if to see that the new buckle was

well secured, and John guessed that he had seized the opportunity to offer a word of advice to his infuriated lord. The Earl seemed mollified by his suggestions, which were probably administered in the disguise of admiration and encouragement: he made ready with more self-control, and levelled his spear deliberately for the body-stroke, a difficult form of attack but one more likely to be decisive. Sempy adopted the same tactics, and the result was a fine encounter: each of the combatants drove his lance fair and square into the centre of his opponent's shield, and both men and horses reeled with the shock,—the riders barely saved themselves by sheer leg-grip from rolling over.

After a short breathing-space the Earl again presented himself. The judges had already agreed that though five courses was the number mentioned in the proclamation, six in all should be allowed to those who wished to run against more than one of the challengers. Sempy accordingly took his station once more. This time both men chose the high point, and each struck the other on the helm with sufficient force to make the sparks fly out; but the Earl's spear held the better of the two, and to the delight of his party he unhelmed his opponent very smartly.

This was the first clear point scored by either side, and the English partisans showed a natural but disproportionate exultation. Huntingdon himself was so elated that he sent Swynnerton with a herald

and a trumpeter to challenge Sempy, for the love of his lady, to run one more course. This, however, was disallowed by the judges, and the Earl was unhelmed by his squires, both parties applauding him so generously that he had no further temptation to ill-humour.

His place was taken by the Earl Marshal, who sent to touch the war shield of Reynault de Roye. It was already known to every one on the ground that he would do so, but the moment was an exciting one, for the French champion had a great reputation, and there were few on the English side who had ever seen him in action. It was the more disappointing that the first course entirely failed, through the shying of both horses. At the second attempt Mowbray had a slight advantage, for he struck his enemy fair and broke his spear. But the third course went against him, for though both helms were struck, and apparently with equal certainty, de Roye passed on and made his turn, while the Englishman was unhelmed and dazed by the blow.

Lord Clifford, who followed him, was greeted warmly by the French, for they had heard that he was a cousin of their old enemy, the famous Chandos. He was successful in unhelming Boucicaut at the second attempt, but in his next course suffered the same fate at the hands of Sempy.

Boucicaut was somewhat shaken by Clifford's stroke, but recovered in time to take a signal

revenge on the next English champion. This was Sir Henry Beaumont, who had the misfortune to cross ahead of his opponent, and so close to him that Boucicaut was able by a brilliant shot to catch him full as he passed and drive him headlong over the crupper. An overthrow such as this counted more than double the points given for unhelming an adversary. The first decisive success had fallen to the French, and the English party was considerably sobered by it. But there was one at least among them whose spirit nothing could affect. Sir Piers Courtenay had seen and felt too many hard knocks in England, France, and Spain to care overmuch whether it was upon his own head or his opponent's that the next would fall. His young squire Dennis cantered gaily up to the elm-tree, and with the breezy confidence of a true Devonian struck the war shield of all three challengers in succession.

This all-round defiance seemed to astonish the French as much as it delighted the English party, and Sir Piers was invited to explain what meaning he wished to be put upon his challenge. He replied that if the judges allowed three courses against each of two antagonists, they might as well allow two courses against each of three; and they had in fact proclaimed the extra allowance to any one wishing to run against "more than one" opponent. The claim was held to be as reasonable as it was spirited, and all three of the

French champions appeared at the entrance of their pavilions accordingly.

The first match was against de Roye, who disarmed his man at the second attempt. Courtenay, however, took this misfortune with supreme good-humour, and as he cantered off with his helm dangling down his back, he called out to his victorious enemy, who was also an old friend, "Mind yourself, Reynault; there are bigger men coming!"

He took Sempy next, and had an ample revenge: the Frenchman missed, and though his spear took Courtenay crossways on the breast it did not spoil his stroke; Sempy's helm flew off like a Turk's head from a post. The last match was the most even of the three: once the combatants staggered each other with a full point in the shield, and in the second course they unhelmed each other precisely at the same moment.

Sir Piers then begged hard for one more chance, against any one of the three challengers; but he was refused, as a matter of course, and made way for the next comer. This was Sir John Golafre, one of the "bigger men" of whom Courtenay had spoken, and the same who had desired to be entered as "first weakling." The joke was passed round again as he rode out, a gigantic figure topped with a bush of red, white, and black plumes, and the hopes of all his party beat high, for he was to run a single match against the great de Roye.

The first course showed the determination of the

combatants, for they rode at a pace that no one had yet approached; but it was indecisive, each striking the other fair on the helm without scoring. At the second attempt the horses were both out of hand, and refused to cope: the sight of their wild swerve only raised the excitement of the spectators to a still higher pitch. In the third course both men chose the body-stroke, and the shock was tremendous; both spears splintered to the truncheon, and it seemed a miracle that de Roye could have borne up against the weight of such an avalanche of steel. The fourth course was taken so fast that both spears missed; in the fifth they came together still faster, amid the wildest excitement, and John's heart bounded as if he had been struck himself, when he saw the two helmless champions parting in their padded coifs. The best match of the day was over, and it had ended in a draw.

There remained only two English knights to take their turn that afternoon, and neither of these was strong enough to try de Roye: one—Sir John Russel—ran level with Sempy; the other provided a surprise, for he defeated Boucicaut, unhelming him so sharply as to draw blood, and then fell from his saddle before the less formidable Sempy.

The day was over, and the points were twenty-four to fifteen against England: at least so said John's friends, Tom and Edmund, and they had

kept the score minutely. John only knew when he reached his lodging that he was as tired as he had ever been in his life: and yet he had been sitting still for more than five hours out of seven.

XI.

JOHN found the second day much less fatiguing: as he had no grand entry to make and no chance of jousting till the Thursday, he was able to discard his armour and attend in comfort upon a hack. He also got a far more ample meal, in the big dining-tent which Boucicaut had erected behind the pavilions for the use of all comers: and now that he had to some extent worked off the feverish excitement which had at first kept him on the stretch, he enjoyed himself a good deal, and would have done so still more if the game had gone less steadily against his own side.

It was evident almost from the beginning that the disadvantage, which looked so great at first sight, of having to meet a continual succession of fresh opponents, counted in practice for very little when weighed against the superior training and experience of the French champions. They rode as well as if they had been resting for a week past; and whereas on the Monday Boucicaut had

been worsted by Clifford and Shirburne, and Sempy by Courtenay and Huntingdon, on Tuesday only four out of eleven Englishmen succeeded in even making a drawn match.

The interest of the meeting centred more and more in de Roye, who was to-day summoned only three times, while his two companions had each to meet four antagonists. Sir William Stamer, the new-made knight, showed more courage than prudence in attempting him; but he was ambitious of proving to his kinsman, the Earl of Huntingdon, that his honours were deserved. In the first course he lost his spear; in the second he made a bad swerve, and was all but thrown in spite of it. The third was a good encounter, but at the fourth he was dishelmed and again driven back almost to the ground.

Sir Godfrey Secker, a Kentish knight, fared even worse, though he was a more experienced joustier. In his third course he actually succeeded in dishelming de Roye, but the Frenchman, with the determination which seemed never to fail him for a moment, drove on through Secker's targe and through his armour as well; the spear broke half-way up, and the end remained fixed in the shield and in the knight's forearm. With such a wound the Englishman did well to make his turn and come to his place in good style; but the match was drawn, and there was no more running for him.

The last of his side to-day was Swynnerton, and

though he certainly was not de Roye's equal in skill, his great strength and weight gave his friends some hope of a success. He came through his first course well, in spite of a shield-stroke that almost unseated him and would have broken the back of a weaker man; at the second encounter both riders took the high point, and the spears flashed finely; but the third was fatal,—the Frenchman unhelmed Roger with a stroke that seemed to stun both man and horse.

The day was over, and once more the points were against England. "Twenty-six to eight!" said the boys ruefully, as they rode home among the squires.

"Wait until to-morrow!" replied Savage with his usual gaiety: to-morrow was his day, and he was still sanguine.

Edmund thought the matter was being treated flippantly, and remonstrated. "N-no, but I say, why do they beat us like this? we always win the b-battles, don't we?"

"No, my friend," growled Swynnerton, whose head was aching; "the archers win them for us."

"But they're not gentlemen," said Tom.

"Good God!" said Swynnerton with an angry snort, "when a man wins, who cares what he is?"

XII.

WEDNESDAY was warm and fine, and the combatants, as they came away from mass in the new English church, talked hopefully once more. The three knights on Huntingdon's list who still remained available against de Roye were all first-rate men, and there were one or two squires to run who had promised well, though it was admitted that none of them could be expected to fly at such high game. Savage, however, knew better than that, and it was hardly his fault if the rest of the world did not know it too, for he talked and laughed in his most excitable manner, unrepressed even by Swynnerton's downright rebukes.

"Because you've a black eye yourself, Roger," he replied, "you see every one else all over bruises."

"Well," retorted the damaged champion, "there are plenty more where I got mine."

The good-humour in his growl touched Savage. "I know," he said,—"I know I'm not fit to fasten your galoshes, Roger, but hope must count for something, and I'd give my whole bag of bones to see how de Roye looks t'other way up."

"So would I," added John with equal fervour.

Swynnerton laughed his loud short laugh. "T'other way up! So you will," he said, "one or both of you!"

John repudiated this dismal prophecy for himself, but privately he felt less confident about his friend. Savage was certainly fearless, but he had no great experience, and was not yet come to his full weight. Moreover, he was first on the order of running for the day, and would have to face de Roye at his freshest, if he persisted in trying him after all.

Two hours later these misgivings were all falsified. Savage did not achieve the miracle he hoped for, but he ran a very spirited match with his great antagonist, and came off upon equal terms with loud applause.

He had noted the Frenchman's methods, his great pace, his more frequent choice of the shield-stroke, and his trick of bending suddenly forward at the moment of the cope: all these he adopted in his first course, and brought off an encounter which was voted second to none that had yet been seen. Both men struck fair, and at such a pace both must have been thrown if their weapons had not given way. As it was, the spears splintered right up to their hands, and each left his point firmly embedded in his opponent's shield: the shock was so loud that every one on the ground feared lest one or both had been seriously injured, and Savage's friends, when he came back to his place, tried hard to persuade him to be content with the danger and the glory of one such encounter.

"Not at all," he replied airily; "I did not

face a Channel crossing to run only a single course."

The words were repeated to de Roye, who had sent to hear his decision: he declared the answer most reasonable, and two more courses were arranged. Of these the first was a failure, for the horses crossed; but the final one was again astonishingly good, both men being unhelmed in the best style.

The two Holland boys, by John's side, were jumping with excitement. "I would rather be Savage than any one on the ground, wouldn't you?" Tom asked.

John smiled at the young enthusiast. "Not I," he replied; "what's past is past."

Tom looked quickly at him and seized the point. "If you do as well to-morrow," he said, "I shall think as well of you."

"Weathercock!" remarked Edmund in his breathless way: he was hugging Savage's damaged shield, with the spear-head still in the centre of it.

Savage himself now joined them on his hackney, and the game went on.

Baskerville lost to Boucicaut; Stapleton drew with Sempy; Scott tried the same champion and unhelmed him at the second course, but was himself rolled headlong at the third. These were but chickens, and expectation rose higher when a full-fledged cock of the game rode out to meet de Roye. This was Sir John Arundel, a well-known dancing

man and always good for a song, but his popularity did not rest only upon his social gifts, for he rode straight and hard.

Of his five courses four were brilliant, and he parted on even terms.

Two more squires fell an easy prey to Boucicaut, and then came the turn of Sir John Clinton, an ambitious young knight in fine armour: he bore the blue chief and silver mullets of his famous house, but to distinguish his shield from that of his kinsman Sir Nicholas, the white field of it was fretted with azure. His reputation was good, and de Roye greeted his summons with a courteous word of welcome. The match was a splendid one, but the five courses ended in a draw, each having at last succeeded in dishelming the other.

And now, after Sempy had defeated young Roger Low, the supreme moment of the day was reached. The last combatant officially told off to meet de Roye was moving forward amid loud cheers: d'Ambrecicourt his father and grandfather had been called in their day, for they belonged to Hainault; but Sir John was English born and bred, by the name of Dabridgecourt, and differenced the red bars on their ermine shield with escallop shells of silver. He wore a coronet on his helm with towering plumes, like a prince; and there was something princely too in the simplicity with which he rode to the elm-tree himself to deliver his summons, as if he had been no more than a squire.

The first course of this match was run in breathless silence: fire flashed from both helms as the spears glanced off them, and a low murmur went round the ground, for the pace was terrific. The second course was even faster, and the spears were splintered like glass. The spectators drew in their breath sharply, and looked at each other with a kind of awe: the atmosphere seemed to have suddenly changed, and the game to be greater than they had known; they felt that the men before them feared neither pain nor death.

A third time the thunder and the crash came: it seemed to John that he himself was stunned; but a moment afterwards he recognised the sound of his own voice as if it had been a stranger's, shouting madly with the rest. Dabridgecourt was turning at the far end of the lists, and in the middle, among the wreckage of the spears, de Roye sat dishelmed and beaten upon his motionless charger.

XIII.

THE boys overtook John on his way to the field next day. They were brimful of his secret and bubbling with excitement. Tom gave advice with an air of proprietorship, to which Edmund listened with undisguised impatience.

"St-tiffen your wrist, and your b-back,—st-tiffen everything except your n-nose," was his parody of his brother.

"Children don't understand these things," retorted Tom; "my uncle and I have been discussing them this morning."

John pricked up his ears: "Discussing what?"

"Well, he said there would be no dogs for the big bear to-day, and I said I knew of one,—of course I didn't say the name."

"Anything more?" asked John.

"Yes; he said he was sorry for the dog, because the bear had a sore head."

John laughed, not altogether comfortably; but he reflected that after all even de Roye could not do better than his best, and he had probably been doing that already.

There he was wrong, as he soon discovered.

The day began tamely with a couple of drawn matches. Then a third Englishman rode out, but he too chose Boucicaut, and was beaten. He was followed by Herr Hansse, a Bohemian knight in the Queen's service: a big man this one, but he too contented himself with summoning Boucicaut. It seemed evident that de Roye's work was over, now that the official list of his opponents was exhausted, and both sides openly regretted it.

But the day was not destined to end as tamely as it had begun. In his first course the Bohemian rode right into his opponent and struck at him

with his spear after the collision was seen to be unavoidable.

In the opinion of the judges the action was deliberate from beginning to end, and they decided that Herr Hansse had forfeited armour and horse, according to the rules.

This incident caused a long interruption of the sport, for though Boucicaut at once refused to take advantage of the forfeiture, he was opposed by the majority of his own side. They urged, with much good sense, that the utmost severity should be enforced against an unfair trick, which might easily have caused the entire defeat of the challengers by putting one of their number out of action for the rest of the thirty days. The English, too, were divided: many were anxious to save the credit of one who, though a foreigner, was a member of their team; but others feared still more lest the Bohemian, if pardoned, might doubly embarrass them by snatching a victory after all.

This last argument came to the ears of the French and touched their pride. They agreed at once to renounce the forfeit and let the Bohemian do his worst. Herr Hansse, in his turn, was stung by this, and when asked with whom he wished to continue the contest, he defiantly named de Roye.

Such unexpected good fortune restored the interest of the combat at once, and when the Bohemian was re-armed, and the two champions took their places,

the silence was as intense and breathless as it had been the day before.

The suspense was soon over: de Roye was in no mood to strike twice. The big Bohemian seemed to be but a straw before him as he swept him from the saddle, bent him across, and tossed him broken from his path.

"Dead, by God!" said Huntingdon. No one else spoke a word: the sight was too much like an execution.

Fortunately Herr Hansse proved to be not dead, nor even seriously injured, though he was completely disabled. A buzz of eager talk broke out, every detail of the stroke was discussed, and no one paid any attention to the next match, in which Sempy defeated a squire of average merit.

"John Marland, do you run?" said the quiet businesslike voice of a herald.

John replied with icy calm, and, indeed, he felt as if he were all turned to ice except his heart, which was beating like a hammer upon a red-hot anvil. He made a little jest as Savage buckled his helmet, and was sure his voice had quavered: when the spear was put into his hand he shook it in correct professional style, and wondered if the others saw the trembling that he felt. But he had never been more alive, never more keen-eyed or tightly strung.

"Remember," said Savage in a low voice, "the high stroke first; then the shield; and come forward sharply at the cope."

A moment afterwards a loud shout went up from all parts of the ground: the squire, whom nobody knew, was seen to have passed by the targes of Boucicaut and Sempy; amid a hurricane of applause his spear touched the war shield of de Roye.

The noise came dimly to John's ears inside his padded nutshell of steel; but he saw hands and caps waving, and as he came back to his place his charger seemed to be stepping on a lonely height above the clouds. Then the muffled trumpet-note took all sense from him for a moment: he woke to see his adversary's helm so near and clear that to miss it would have been impossible: not till he had struck it and passed on did he feel, or remember to have felt, a sharp blow upon his own vizor. He made his turn with perfect ease; everything seemed easier than it had ever been before. All round him the waving and far-off noise continued.

He levelled his spear again—for the body-stroke this time: he saw that his opponent was doing the same. He fixed his eyes upon de Roye's shield: "Gules with a bend silver," he repeated to himself to pass the time, for it seemed long before the trumpet sounded.

At last he was off, quite wide awake now, and spurring his charger. He came forward smartly for the shock, and felt that he had saved himself by doing so: the horses reeled apart, the spears vanished without breaking, and John found himself pushing a half-stunned charger into a canter for

the turn. A moment later half a dozen hands were on his bridle, his helm was off, his coif laid back, and the full roar of cheering broke on his ears.

"He owes me one more, doesn't he?" he asked.

"One more," replied the Earl's voice, "and I owe you a gold chain if you win."

But knighthood and gold chains seemed as little now to John as any other of the small affairs of life: he was concerned with states of being, not with things.

"Thank you, my lord," he said, and felt his mouth stiff and salt as he spoke: he was breathing hard, too, and losing that delightful keenness of the senses. He took a deep chestful of air, mounted his second charger, and put on his helm. There was the red and white shield again, but it was less bright now, and the spear, which they had picked up and brought back to him, seemed a little heavier than before.

At what a pace that shield was coming: he must get forward—forward—ah!—late! He knew it, and knew nothing more till he felt cold water splashing over his face.

"I was late," he explained as they raised him.

Above him the Earl was looking down from his saddle with the unmoved expression of one who handles a dead rabbit.

"So the crock is not broken this time," he said, and presently added, "You wished to enter my service, I believe?"

John tried in vain to collect his senses: he had but one feeling left — the desire to escape the presence of those eyes. He saw the boys by their uncle's side: any shelter seemed better than none.

"I am pledged to my lord Thomas," he said.

"It is the same thing," said the Earl, turning carelessly away: and John was left to the congratulations of his friends.

PART II.

SHADOWS BEFORE DAWN

XIV.

“JOHN, do you remember St Inglebert?”

The question brought no reply. Nicholas turned with the least possible exertion which would serve his purpose, glanced at his companion, and, seeing that he was comfortably sleeping, lapsed again into the deep waters of reverie.

The scene before him was one of rare and unsurpassed loveliness: even in England, the land of homelike sylvan beauty, even in Yorkshire, with all its far vistas and innumerable hills, there is no place of delight that dare boast itself above the Arncliffe woods, nor any with a prospect wider or more enchanted than that which they look upon towards the hour of sunset. From the curving edge of their high terrace, where he lay in a chance gap among the oak-trees, Nicholas could see close under him the Hall, the garden, and the tiny church of Arncliffe: in the sheer space between, a hawk was poised in mid-air, swinging now and again either up or down, to left or right, as if to sound like a living plummet the incredible depth of so tranquil an abyss. Beyond, upon the plain,

lay Ingleby, nestling among its meadow-elms; beyond that again the manor of Irby, and the great grange of Rounton. Due west his eye travelled on over the Vale of Mowbray, from Harlesey and Morton towards Danby Wiske and Hutton Bonville, tiny specks of red roof, imagined rather than seen, in a pattern of long shadows; and then moved farther and farther yet into the infinitely distant world of the sunset, where range beyond range of hills glowed with the soft clear outlines and ethereal colouring of dreamland.

Presently his companion stirred and sat upright. Nicholas showed no sign that he had been waiting; he repeated his question, perhaps a very little more deliberately, but with exactly the same manner and intonation as before.

“John, do you remember St Inglebert?”

Marland was staring at the far-away glory. “I do,” he replied in a dreamy tone, which proved that he certainly did not.

Nicholas was patient but caustic. “You’ll remember it better before long,” he remarked; “let me remind you that after your disgrace——”

“After what?” asked John, suddenly roused.

“After your disgrace at the hands of that young Frenchman,” continued his friend quietly, “my lord of Huntingdon was good enough to offer you a refuge in the New June.”

“Which I did not accept,” retorted John.

“Which you accepted on the spot, and have

enjoyed ever since," said Nicholas in a tone of courteous assent.

"Oh, look here!" John remonstrated, "you know all about it: I thought . . . that is, I expected . . ."

"I see—and then it all turned out quite differently from what you thought or expected."

"You needn't ask me how it turned out," said John; "you've been living cheek by jowl with me these five years: what are you driving at?"

"I neither drive nor am driven."

"I am driven, I suppose you mean."

"You and the rest," replied Nicholas in the same quiet and cheerful tone, "down a steep place."

John laughed. "You've started this argument before," he said; "but it is the first time you've called me a swine."

"An oversight," replied Nicholas; "let us say sheep: it is not the herd but the devils that matter."

"Well?"

"The devils of this age," said the monk, "are the familiar spirits of the rich: their names are Spend, Get, and Ruthless."

"If it is a devil that possesses me," replied John, "it is a different one from those: in five years I have only once spent more than I had to spend, I have never made a penny, and I have certainly not been ruthless,—I wish I had." He ended with a tinge of bitterness.

Nicholas looked kindly at him and his voice

changed. "What you say is true enough, dear sheep; your demon is another, and you call him Loyalty."

"What now?" John retorted; "you are a king's man yourself."

"I am," said the other, "so long as the king holds of his overlord, no longer." He crossed himself, and his eyes sought John's with an unmistakable challenge. There was a moment's silence; John looked uneasy, but seemed finally to decide on resistance.

"I don't understand you," he said in a still more combative tone. "I never know what you religious people mean. I am bound to the king by the tenure of my lands, by my duty to my natural lord, and by a vow made before the altar of Our Lady of Barking, as you know very well: how do you propose that I should stifle these obligations? Under a cowl?"

Nicholas bent his head; a deep flush dyed his massive neck and temples, but he made no reply. John continued his argument.

"I know you think Richard high-handed, but what would you have? A king must be a king."

The monk lifted a perfectly serene face. "Certainly," he said, "a king cannot be less than a king."

John did not miss the meaning in his voice, but he ignored it. "Very well, then; we help him to his own."

"In the language of the New June," asked Nicholas, "what does 'his own' mean? Does it include his revenge?"

John seemed to feel the net closing round him, and he struggled the more fiercely. "Look here," he exclaimed, "I'll tell you how it is: I play the game of life, and you stand by and claim to criticise though you have never taken a hand yourself. What would you do if you were one of us? When Richard was young he was at his uncle's mercy; high-handed was no word for Gloucester in those days, and Arundel and Warwick were as bad. As for ruthlessness, if ever any one was ruthless,—have you forgotten how John Salusbury died, and old Sir Simon Burley? And why must Oxford go?—driven out like a dog! Is a man to have no friends because he happens to be king? You speak as a preacher of peace, but you seem to forget on which side peace lies. What king of England has ever thought less of war and conquest or more of the prosperity of the country? Why, his unwarlike character is made a continual reproach to him, and by whom? By these same princely bullies whom you would save from the punishment they have been earning for years. I tell you that if you don't know the truth about Gloucester you are the last man left to hear it: he hasn't even the decency to keep his treason to himself; he bawls aloud for war, war, war with France, war on any pretext and in face of any obligations to the contrary.

Perhaps you remember, when we had war with France in '86, how this noble warrior and his gang behaved. While the enemy were planning invasion they blocked all business in both Houses, to get poor Suffolk out of office, and then, when for all they knew the French fleet might be in the Thames at any moment, they talked openly of dethroning the king himself. You don't need me to tell you these things, Nicholas—you are older than I am, you were in London all through. Who was it that moved for the record of Edward the Second's deposition to be read aloud in Parliament, to acquaint honourable members with the forms of the Constitution in certain cases made and provided? Who was it that invented on the spur of the moment an ancient statutory right for Parliament to remove a king and to put in his place some other member of the royal house? Some other member! I tell you that the country is unsafe while such a ruffian is allowed to be at large: the safety of the country is the king's first duty, and if we can help him to secure it, why are we swine or sheep?"

Nicholas listened with grave courtesy to this harangue, as though he had never heard any of the points before. He replied in a tone so simple and yet so cool that no one could have divined whether his mood was one of candour or of irony.

"My dear John, I have nothing to say for the Duke of Gloucester: I was anxious for your own

soul, and you have convinced me. If your conscience is on guard, mine may sleep in peace."

John looked a little uncomfortable. "I don't say that," he began.

"But I do," replied his friend; "I am sure of it. Now let us be getting homewards."

He rose to his feet and moved away along the green terrace path to the south: John followed him more slowly and with a dissatisfied air. At the entrance of the first short cut to the right Nicholas plunged down the steep hillside, and kept his lead till they reached the lowest track of all, which wound between the edge of the wood and the boundary-fence of the cultivated land below. When John overtook him at last they were both hot and breathless.

"Too steep for August," said the monk genially, as they halted, "and it was I that drove you down that."

John took his arm, but without a smile: he still looked preoccupied, and they walked on in silence.

XV.

THE forest path along which they were now moving formed a natural gallery or cloister; on their left the steep bank of oakwood rose like a solid wall, on the right a hedge with frequent gaps let in the

last fading shafts of sunset: above them the roof was groined with overhanging branches, and the massy foliage of its vault was already dense with the gathering twilight.

John, as he leaned moodily upon his friend's arm, saw little of all this beyond the green floor at his feet; but he was conscious of a slackening of the pace at which he was being led, and when Nicholas stopped altogether he looked suddenly up.

Forty yards ahead of them, at a point where the path began to curve, two girls were gazing eagerly through the hedge into the field below. Their hunting-dresses of green cloth made them one with the sylvan background, into which it seemed that they might at any moment fade again as silently as they had appeared: they were moving mysteriously upon tiptoe, and with intense precaution. An instant later they stepped forward out of the shadow, and John saw that they carried bows: they raised their hands together, and drew their arrows to the head with the grace that belongs to no sport but that of archery. Then, almost before the bolts could reach their mark, they both ran forward into the gap through which they had aimed, and peered through it to see the effect of the volley, still keeping silence with the self-restraint of practised shots.

Their search was apparently fruitless, and Nicholas thought his time had come for moving on. As he did so his white dress caught the eye of one of the

archers: she uttered an indignant exclamation, and said something to her companion which was not quite so audible. The second lady, who was less tall and of a slighter figure, laid her hand gently upon her arm as if to hold her back, but she broke away and came quickly along the path towards the two men. They halted again as she approached, and greeted her with a rather confused bow, for they had some inkling of who she was and what she was about to say.

There was anger in every stride that brought her down upon them, and in the curt nod with which she brushed the monk aside and turned abruptly to speak to John.

"Good evening," she said; "my name is Margaret Ingleby: I need not ask yours, but perhaps you will tell me how far you have come along this track."

"I don't know," he replied; "we have been over to Arncliffe."

"Then you have spoiled what little chance we had left, as your Holland friends have spoiled our hawking all day."

The scorn in her voice stung John the more because of the rare beauty of its tone: the words were petulant enough in themselves, but the sheer music of them vibrated among his heartstrings, and roused in him a kind of answering passion.

"Madam," he said, "I regret that anything should anger you; but those who pluck another

man's tree can hardly complain if the owner has been before them."

"The owner!" she cried indignantly; "I am on my father's manor of Bordelby."

"My young lord," retorted John, "uses the same words with better right."

Her grey eyes flashed straight into his. "A claim," she said, "is not always a right, sir."

"But in this case," he replied, "there is both: the Earl inherits from the Stutvilles."

She turned upon him again like lightning.

"That may be an answer for the lawyers: for the rest of us, a wry neck is none the less ugly for being hereditary."

He glanced instinctively at the slender and shapely neck before him, and then up again to the grey eyes. The angry sunset fire had gone out of them, and a faint light like that of the first stars seemed to be twinkling in their depths. After all she was very young, and her adversary was clearly at her feet. In another moment they were both smiling. "This really cannot go on," she said, and her gentler voice moved him no less than before. "My father says you do it every year."

"I have been here five times now," he replied, "by the Earl's order, of course, to keep his claim alive."

She smiled again at the earnestness of this plea. "Five wrongs don't make a right — and

never will, however long you go on adding to them."

She looked round and saw that her friend was now standing at her side. Her face was grave again as she turned to John.

"You are on your way home: we will not keep you any longer."

The sudden coldness of this dismissal paralysed John: he bowed mechanically and turned away to follow Nicholas, who was already some way ahead. But before he had made up half the distance he became aware of a light footstep behind him. He turned in astonishment and met the grey eyes once more.

"I have something to tell you," said the lady a little breathlessly, considering the short distance she had run.

"Yes?" said John as she hesitated, but he wished that it might be long before the something was told.

"It is not the sport that I care about—and in any case my own pleasure is nothing; but this is not a very large place, and I was afraid, after what has happened the first day, that we may be constantly meeting some of your party."

John was silent: he could not say that he hoped not.

"I must tell you why it is so impossible—so utterly impossible," she said; "the lady with me is Lady Joan Stafford."

John's face fell: he knew that there was a bitter feud between the Hollands and the Staffords, and though he had never had an opinion of his own upon the quarrel, which arose long before his time, he had heard enough to feel sure that the fault lay with Lord Huntingdon, whom he had never ceased to mistrust since he first flinched from his cruel eyes five years ago at Calais. It was on the tip of his tongue to say that Tom and Edmund were not in the least like their uncle, but a better inspiration came. "I think," he said, "that I can do something; at any rate, I will do my best. How long will Lady Joan be with you?"

"A week at least, and we meant to go out every day."

His own thought made him flush guiltily. "If you could be on the moor early to-morrow," he said, "I would try to keep them away from the Arncliffe end, at all events."

"Thank you," she said warmly, and gave him her hand.

Nicholas was waiting for him at the gate, but John was not communicative. "I'll tell you about it later on," was all that he thought necessary by way of apology for his delay.

XVI.

IF John had not seen them since the days of St Inglebert he would hardly have recognised his boyish friends Tom and Edmund in the two young men who met him on his way back this evening. Time had done much for both of them, and had taken but little toll in return. Edmund had grown into a tall youth of seventeen: he had almost lost his charming stammer, but the poetry had not yet died out of his brown eyes, and he still combined a faculty of going abruptly to the heart of a matter with a love of romance which often appeared oddly inconsistent with it. Tom seemed at first sight to have gained even more: he was a man now, almost twenty-one, and on the verge of knighthood and a separate establishment. He took a more serious view of life than was apparent from his manner, which was still boyishly quick and eager. To those who knew him as intimate friends there was some weakness, some pride, some wilfulness to be regretted; but these faults were redeemed by a warmth of heart which often put them all three into the background. In the presence of Nicholas Love he never lost his grip: to John he was never anything but an equal and a reasonable being. His real danger lay not so much in his own character as in that of his

uncle Huntingdon, who held him in the collar of old habit and affection, and had learned only too thoroughly how to lead him easily at will.

To-night the elder brother was in a silent mood, very unusual with him, and as they sat at supper it was Edmund who gave John an account of the day's sport. They had spent some nine hours on the heather, the hawks had done well, and the grouse had been plentiful. But the great event had been their meeting with the two ladies who had come up to the moor in the afternoon, and been quite as much astonished, though not, as it appeared, so openly indignant, at the encounter with them as at their second interruption by John and Nicholas in the evening.

John found himself taking the side of the ladies when it came to the argument about rights.

"After all," he said, "we haven't very much to go upon: I felt that myself."

Tom looked up quickly at this, but said nothing. Edmund was loud enough for both.

"I don't know what you mean," he remonstrated; "we're in our own house here, on our own manor."

"The house," said John, "is a hunting lodge, and a small one at that: it has been the custom of your family to call it a manor house, in order to lend colour to their claim. But that doesn't settle the matter. Sir John Ingleby has a set-off to your house—he has a private chapel on the place: there's something very seigneurial about a private chapel."

Tom growled: the conversation seemed to displease him.

"There's something very seigneurial about Tom to-night," said his brother. "I suppose it is the cold wind just before the sunrise. Another year, you know, we shall not be sitting here like this, all four together; Nicholas will have a side table, and you and I, John, will be waiting on Sir Thomas."

"Quite right," replied John, laughing; "that's what I'm for: happily I'm used to it."

Tom looked reproachfully at him. "In London," he said, "I can't alter the rules there; but you don't wait on me here, and you never will."

"Pardon me," said John, remembering his promise to the archers, "I shall attend you to-morrow on the moor."

"There will be no hawking to-morrow," replied Tom.

Edmund exclaimed loudly.

"Well," said his brother, "at any rate not in the morning. It's no use making a row, Edmund—the matter's settled. I've sent to Ingleby to say that if his daughters like to go out first they shall not be disturbed by us."

"They're not his daughters," retorted Edmund; "he's only got one daughter."

"I'm aware of the fact," replied Tom, "but as I don't know the other young lady's name—— He looked at John: but John pretended not to see and turned the subject.

"I'm glad you've done that," he said. "I had thought of suggesting something of the kind myself."

"The fact is," remarked Edmund severely, "old Ingleby's been too much for you both; he has put his women and children in front, and you can't shoot."

Tom was not above scoring, however irrelevantly.

"The children are just your age and size," he retorted.

"One of them was," replied Edmund, "the tall one—she's Margaret Ingleby. I remember her in short frocks. But the little one was quite different—she spoke to me as if she was my aunt: she was almost as seigneurial as you, Tom."

He delivered this as a parting shot from the doorway, through which he was following Nicholas, candle in hand. After a moment's silence John, too, rose to go, and stood waiting for his young lord.

Tom raised his eyes and looked him straight in the face.

"John," he said, "who was the other girl? I'm certain you know."

"I do," replied John. "Her name is Joan Stafford."

Tom winced and looked dazed, as if some one had struck him unexpectedly, but the quick pride of youth saved him.

"Stafford?" he said. "Who cares?" But from that word till his squire bade him good-night there was no more conversation between them.

XVII.

JOHN slept restlessly, and before midnight was once more wide awake. His window had no curtain, and the light of a full moon was pouring into the room: the owls were no longer screeching close to the house, but from far up the hill came the ghostly voices of their more musical kindred, shout after shout quivering with the delight of their aerial chase.

He looked out into the cool night: the great silver disk hung like a lantern just above the topmost ridge of the wood: the steep hillside was like a monstrous black wave silvered on all its feathery edges, never breaking, but always about to break and bury the whole world in fathomless darkness. Under it lay the smooth shallows of the bare little garden, a lawn grey-green and a path all white, along which ran a low wall whiter and colder still. Against this wall a figure leaned, as silent and motionless as the stones themselves: rigid enough it looked in the moonlight to be mistaken for a statue, and John, who knew well that it could be nothing less human than Nicholas, found himself gazing fixedly at the outline of the tall white cowl, and wondering whether the moment would ever come when he would see it move.

It moved at last—very slightly, but the mood was broken. John dressed quickly and went down.

He made what seemed to him a loud noise upon the path, but Nicholas did not stir. They leaned side by side against the wall, and for some time neither spoke a word. John's mind no doubt was less at peace than his friend's, for it was he who broke the silence at last.

"Nicholas," he asked in a voice subdued to the quiet that surrounded them, "what was the beginning of this feud?"

Nicholas knew that he could only be thinking of the quarrel with the Staffords, but he paused so long before replying that John was almost startled when the answer came.

"Yes," he said, "I will tell you. You won't thank me; possibly you won't believe me: but you ought to have the chance."

He was silent again, as if collecting his thoughts.

"I wonder," he said at last, "that you have not heard the story; but I suppose you were a child at the time. It is ten years old now, and no one cares to speak of it; but what has been sown must be reaped some day. Now listen and tell me what you think. The king was at Beverley, on his way north against the Scots: he was a boy, of course, in the hands of his uncles. Both the Hollands were with him—Kent and Huntingdon, then Sir John—and many more, among them Lord Stafford and his son Sir Ralph, and a Bohemian knight who was over on a mission to the queen. They were quartered in the villages round, and it happened by

ill-luck that the Bohemian was given a good house which Sir John Holland's people had already marked, or claimed to have marked. Two of Holland's squires went over to see about it: they found the knight just outside the village and had some words with him. The argument seems to have been conducted on strictly national lines: the Bohemian was smiling and unintelligible, and gesticulated a good deal; the Englishmen were very English—the elder of them doggedly refused to yield his point and declared that he would not leave the knight till he gave in, the younger one forgot his manners and ridiculed the foreigner's broken English."

John changed his position: Nicholas took the movement for one of impatience.

"I tell you all this at some length," he said, "but I have a reason for doing so. I am drawing a picture: it is not my fault if it is not a pleasing one."

"No, no," replied John, "you mistake; I was listening."

"While the scene was going on," Nicholas continued, "two archers happened to come up. They were Stafford's men, and they, too, were quite English. They drew attention to the fact that the valiant squires were two against one, and also suggested that a little courtesy would be in place in dealing with a stranger and a fellow-countryman of the queen. The squires reminded them, in reply, that archers were persons of subordinate rank: to

which they returned that this consideration did not trouble them at all, for their master, Sir Ralph Stafford, was any man's equal, and was a friend of the Bohemian knight."

The ironical tone of the narrative did not escape John's ear, but he made no comment.

"The younger squire," Nicholas went on, "thereupon remembered his own rank and its advantages. He drew his sword and struck at the nearest archer, who had, he thought, no sufficient answer to this argument. The man, however, was holding his bow ready bent in his hand; he sprang back and laid an arrow on the string; then he cordially invited his adversary to a continuance of the discussion on the same lines. The squire saw the weakness of his own point, and hesitated; but his companion, a man who never wastes time over speech or scruples, gave the word to charge, and they both ran in. The boy was instantly shot through the body: his friend carried him the whole way back to Beverley, but he was dead before they reached the town.

"The news of what had happened was brought to Stafford and Holland about the same time. It seemed not unlikely that both sides had been partly to blame: in such a case two lines are always open to be taken. Sir Ralph's view perhaps hardly befitted his station: he merely told his man he would do his best for him if he kept quiet, and set out for Beverley at once to see what reparation he

could make. Holland chose the more high-minded course: he undertook in plain language to be revenged on the foreigner or to forfeit his soul if he failed, and rode off with a dozen men at his back to look for consolation of the one kind or the other. It was now late at night and quite dark: in a narrow lane he saw horsemen approaching. Their leader, in answer to a question, gave his name as Ralph Stafford. Holland drew at once, and judging it unnecessary to give a young and inexperienced swordsman the trouble of defending himself, especially in the dark, he put an end to the quarrel, so far as Sir Ralph was concerned, with a single blow, and returned to Beverley, where he took sanctuary in the House of St John.

“Next day, after burying his son, the Earl of Stafford with fifty or sixty of his friends came to the king and demanded justice. Holland’s people complained at the same time of the loss of a valuable squire. The king undertook to give satisfaction to both parties: he took formal possession of Holland’s estates as a security and made him found three chaplaincies at Langley; then gave him back his property and added as much again, married him to Lancaster’s daughter, and appointed him Constable of the Spanish expedition; on his return he gave him more land and the Earldom of Huntingdon. So you see neither party came away empty-handed; some thought the balance seemed a little heavier on one side than the other; but it

must be remembered that the Earl of Stafford, from an exaggerated sense of discipline, neglected to press his claims during the whole time the army was in Scotland, while the Hollands showed untiring diligence in strengthening the hands of justice."

The story overclouded John's mind with a storm of doubt, akin to that which had troubled his horizon on the hill that afternoon. He was accustomed to the irony which his friend almost invariably used, whether in a humorous or a severer mood: but there was one phrase here which had lit up the tumult of his thoughts like a lightning flash, and seemed to have burnt itself upon his brain. The elder of the two squires—the one upon whom the guilt of both these violent deaths mainly rested—how had Nicholas spoken of him? "A man who never wastes time over speech or scruples." The description was only too vivid: and the word "wastes" brought it terribly near.

"You spoke of the squire as though you still knew him."

To this Nicholas returned no reply. John waited long, and tried more than once to see the expression upon his companion's face; but the monk's head was sunk upon his breast, and not even the outline of his features could be distinguished in the deep shadow beneath his cowl. "Was it Swynnerton?" John knew in his heart that he was answered: this silence was an assent to his worst fear, louder

than words, and a kind of despairing impulse drove him to heap his own misery higher still.

"I have a story, too, that I must tell you," he said; "I have kept it from you for more than a year, but I knew, after what you said this afternoon, that I couldn't hide it much longer—it has often troubled me.

"Two years ago, when Savage and Swynnerton were still unmarried, Savage came to me one day and told me that Roger's lady had agreed to marry him at once if he could get her divorced from Villeneuve. The only difficulty was the expense: the amount it would cost to send the petition to Rome and present it and get it through was quite beyond anything Roger could raise. Savage proposed that he and I should find the money between us: I was pleased with the idea of doing something for Roger that he couldn't do for himself, and I knew that I should be helping on Savage, too, with his own affair, for Roger and he had made a bargain to back each other. The business was not easy, but it was done, and Swynnerton was married, as you remember, and went to live at his wife's place in Staffordshire. You remember, too, how he was arrested not long afterwards on suspicion of having been concerned in the death of Sir John Ipstones. There was very little evidence available, and when Parliament had risen Huntingdon got him released, the charge was dropped, and to this moment no one has ever known the truth."

"I have," said Nicholas from the sombre shadow of his hood.

John started. "Since when?" he asked. "Who told you?"

"Yourself: to-night," replied the voice from the shadow.

It was clear enough: the story of Stafford's death had been purposely told so as to throw Swynnerton's figure into relief, and John saw that his own evident anxiety about one crime had confirmed suspicions as to the other, long dormant but never forgotten. The whole drama of his own story came before him as a hideous picture, and he felt relief in the thought that henceforth he would not have to look at it alone; he was in haste to put it all before his friend.

"The boys had gone to Conway with Huntingdon," he said,—*"I have lied a hundred times to keep them from knowing where I was that night. We two—Savage and I—had leave for a week, as we were so near home. We met Swynnerton by arrangement at a small inn near Cannock. At dinner he told us that Ipstones was going up to London to take his seat in the House, and would be passing close to where we were that same afternoon, with four or five men with him. He meant to challenge him for his disgraceful treatment of Maud Swynnerton, Roger's cousin—he had shut her up and plundered her and married her to his wretched son. It sounded like a chance of hard*

fighting, and Savage and I agreed to stand by him. We left the inn after dinner and went a mile or two to some cross roads; there we waited in the side road; it began to get towards dusk, but no one came. It was a sunless January day: I thought it would soon be too dark for fighting and I said so, but I couldn't get a word out of Swynnerton, and Savage only laughed.

"At last we heard the sound of hoofs: across the angle of the roads we saw a single figure close to us, and we could tell by the clatter behind that others were following at some little distance. We trotted out of our side road at a moderate pace, as if we were on an errand of our own, and found ourselves just half-way between the leader and his men. I began to wonder what was to be the next move; and then, suddenly it was all over. Swynnerton pushed on, leaving us between himself and the servants behind: he overtook Ipstones almost directly and called his name. Ipstones looked round over his right shoulder and began to pull up; Swynnerton crossed behind him to the left side of the road; at the same moment he pulled out his sword, and when Ipstones laid his hand on his own hilt Swynnerton drove at him: he took him full under the left arm, just as his own point was clearing the scabbard. We were level with them in a moment, not knowing quite what had happened, though we guessed it all from what we could see against the sky: as we came up to Swynnerton the other horse

turned off to the right, and the rider fell from his saddle on to the strip of grass by the roadside. We all three wheeled round and sat there to see what was going on: Ipstones' men had halted in a line on the other side, and two of them had dismounted to lift him up. They propped him with his back against a bush and began to search for the wound: the little light there was was behind us, and we could see them better than they could see us. The other men seemed to be opening saddle-bags for things to make a bandage: they none of them offered to attack us, but the nearest fellow, who was kneeling by his master, said in a voice of dreadful indignation and hate, 'What sort of fighting do you call that?' We didn't answer, but Swynnerton leaned over and jerked the dying man's sword towards them with the point of his own. The man took it up and drew the blade through the fingers of his left hand. Then he spoke even more bitterly, 'Ay! but it's a clean one, this!' I can't tell you how miserable I felt when I heard those words: I have never forgotten them. I felt that the whole world must be hating us in the same way; and I must have been unconsciously turning to go, for Swynnerton suddenly caught my rein and held it: he hooked Savage's, too, with his sword hand, and we stayed there without a word. At last the gasping stopped, and I could see that Ipstones was sinking slowly down. Then Swynnerton pushed his horse in front of mine, and dragged Savage round

with him so as to wheel the three of us at once: we went off at a gallop, and no one spoke until we reached the inn we had started from. There was a bright light in the window now, and the house looked so quiet and full of comfort that it seemed as if we had only to go in and everything could be put back as it was in the morning. But when I drew up, Swynnerton caught my rein again—he must have been on the look-out—and said, ‘Come on, you fool!’ and we rode on, down one black lane after another, till I was utterly lost.”

He stopped abruptly: the more dreadful the story became the more ineffectually he seemed to be telling it: in the effort to convey the feeling of horror which was impressed upon his own mind, his voice had become strained and toneless.

“It is no use going on,” he said, “you know it all now.”

Nicholas raised himself from the wall on which he had been leaning, and turned towards his companion.

“Very much alike, the two stories, aren’t they?” He spoke in a brisk, almost cheerful voice.

“It is ghastly,” replied John.

“It is, rather,” said Nicholas, “but I think you take an unreasonable view of it, all the same,—a view which you would find it very difficult to defend.”

“What do you mean?” asked John, astonished and almost indignant.

"Well, take Swynnerton's case," replied Nicholas in the same tone of perfect simplicity. "What fault do you find with him? He kills his enemy, you say, on a dark and lonely road, without giving him a word of warning or any chance of defending himself. Now you see something cowardly in that, I imagine?"

"So do you," retorted John.

"Not at all: Swynnerton is a man of principle, and his courage is beyond question, as you know very well. It is your own weakness that makes you disloyal to your friend. Look straight at the question as it came before him: he must get this divorce: to do that, he must make his bargain with Savage: the only way in which he could repay Savage was by removing Ipstones: the fairer the fight the greater the risk of failure: murder was the only effective and certain method."

"In other words," said John, "if you desire the end you desire the means, especially when there is only one way open. But you may give up the end, if the means are impossible."

"Give up?" said the quiet reasonable voice. "You forget. Do you seriously mean that a man is to give up, for extraneous considerations, his own will, the very essence of his life as man, the quality by which his place in the world is determined and maintained? Once admit that possibility and you are defeated from the beginning:

there is no loss to which you will not submit, no competitor to whom you will not surrender."

John knew his friend too well to mistake his meaning, however paradoxically he might express it: he knew also that in a life-long conversation like theirs there could be no rounded and satisfying conclusions.

"I'm too tired to think it out now," he said; "let us go to bed."

They walked slowly to the house: at the door they halted again.

"There's one thing," said John; "we were going a bit off the main track. It was chiefly revenge that Swynnerton wanted, and Huntingdon was thinking of nothing else."

"No matter," replied the other. "Revenge, too, is something that we owe to our purpose. It is the impulse to remove what has once thwarted us and may thwart us again: the desire to restore the humiliated will—in the common phrase, to get back our own. You could not give up revenge."

"Nicholas!"

"Very well: then you will be putting back the clock and returning from the Age of Power to the Age of Obligation."

"You don't advise me," said John.

"I? I am one of the cowards, the defeated: I surrendered long ago, and my place is in my cell. I walk in terror till I am there again."

XVIII.

JOHN woke next morning in a very different mood. It would not be fair to say that he had forgotten the story which Nicholas had wrung from him in the hour of darkness, but it had certainly for the time receded into the background of his thoughts. It was really with the future rather than the past that his conscience was mainly concerned : he dreaded not so much the memory of a crime already committed as the possibility that he might be led to take part in acts of the same kind in the struggle which he knew was coming nearer every day. To that struggle he actually looked forward,—in spite of all that Nicholas had been saying for months past he longed to put into blows the loyalty which he had no other way of expressing,—but the natural chivalry of his character and his thirst for honourable distinction demanded a fight against odds and the fairest of tactics. If he held to those conditions, as he was determined to do, he need not trouble himself so much for the present about the character or antecedents of those with whom he was forced to associate. It was, moreover, becoming more and more probable that his own young lord would shortly take an important place in the inner council of the king's party, and though he knew himself to be the stronger character he

felt that to have such a friend in some sort depending upon him would be an additional safeguard and support to his own resolve.

These were good reasons, if he had been in need of reasons, for giving himself up to the free enjoyment of another summer's day, and his first waking thought was all of pleasures to come.

He had promised that his party should leave the moor for the Inglebys; it was fortunate that Tom had himself been seized with the same idea, or the undertaking might have proved a difficult one to fulfil, but the way was now clear for his second move. He had been interested in the two archers, and without knowing why or how much he wished it, he saw an opportunity of renewing the acquaintance so oddly made the evening before. The Stafford feud loomed vaguely in his mind as the cause of his interest; but if he had looked more closely he would have seen that his thought actually reflected not the slender grace of Lady Joan but the tall angry goddess of the grey eyes, who had lashed and healed him with a touch unlike any he had known.

His first care was to inquire what the rest of the party were planning. Edmund was starting with the falconer to make purchases in Northallerton. Nicholas was reading in the garden: either of them would be glad of his company or, evidently, quite content without it. Tom had taken

a hasty breakfast and gone out, — down the road, said Edmund vaguely. John was master of himself and his opportunity.

He, too, started by strolling down the road, with an air of indecision; but he soon strayed off into the fields on the right, and in ten minutes was exactly opposite the gap in the hedge through which he had seen that volley discharged twelve hours ago. The ladies had forgotten to pick up their arrows: if he could find them, as he had no doubt of doing, they would serve him as an excuse for the meeting on which he had set his heart.

He walked up the field towards the wood without finding anything: climbed over the fence and placed himself in the position of the archers, marked the line of their shot and followed it up with extreme care. Thirty paces—nothing; fifty—nothing; a hundred—surely they could not have chanced their arrows on so long a flight, especially at dusk. At last, after covering the whole ground half a dozen times, he decided that some of the farm people must have been before him; and then only did he recollect that on his first approach he had seen, while lifting his head for a moment to look for the gap, a man's figure moving along the woodland path on the other side of the hedge. Whoever it might have been it was far too late to think of overtaking him now, and as John climbed once more through the fence and began

to walk the green and gold arcade of the sylvan cloister, he fell to devising some other excuse which would facilitate his second intrusion into Diana's presence. Several more or less happy speeches occurred to him as he passed along the woodside, and filled his mind while he climbed the steep slope of the hill down which Nicholas had led him so breathlessly the day before; but his thoughts were unusually wayward this morning, and he had not yet decided, when he reached the terrace walk at the top, behind which pretext he really meant to shelter his confusion.

Now he was once more at the spot where he had sat with Nicholas: once more Arncliffe lay beneath him, with the morning shadows drawing in beneath the wall of the moated garden; but beautiful as it was, he turned his back on the westward view, and made for the long roll of the moor on the reverse slope of the ridge.

Here, too, he saw no trace of those for whom he was looking; until at last, moving knee-deep through the sea of heather, he came to a place where the plateau broke suddenly away downhill. There, not ten yards below him, was all that he sought—and more: to the left stood a patient group of ponies, falconers, and keepers; to the right, reclining and almost sunken among the purple billows, lay the huntress maids. Both were unaware of his approach, for both were laughing quietly, with kind eyes shining upon a young

man who occupied a convenient boulder seat opposite to them.

“Tom!”

The young man did not hear the exclamation: he was talking gaily, and in his right hand he grasped two bird-bolts, which were evidently furnishing the subject of his discourse.

XIX.

“HERE they are,” he was saying as John approached, “and there he is,” he added, brandishing the arrows in one hand while with the other he pointed at his astonished squire.

John took off his cap in silence: he had not a word to say, for he felt that he was among total strangers. The ladies were not the ladies he had met overnight, though they were very like them, and Tom was entirely changed from any Tom he had ever known before. This was neither his pupil nor his lord, but a sprightly young man with a ready manner and a fluent tongue, master of the situation, which indeed he seemed to have created, pleased with himself and pleasing to those who listened to him.

“Good morning, sir,” he said, bowing in response to John. “You are evidently a stranger in these

parts: do you care about sport? Will you join us? Or are you looking for something you have lost? No? then I insist; let us introduce ourselves."

He turned to the ladies, who followed his rattle with unconcealed enjoyment. "This," he said, waving the arrows at the taller of them, "is our hostess, Margot, the daughter of Malvoisin, a neighbouring magnate with an expressive name. This is her distinguished guest, the Lady Bienvenue L'Estrange; and my brother and I—he is not here just now—are known as the Stuttervilles: we owe the appellation partly to our ancestors and partly to the elegant taste of the Demoiselle de Malvoisin in her younger days. It commemorates, I understand, a personal defect."

"No, no," laughed Margot, "a personal charm."

"Ah!" replied the Stutterville gentleman, "the times are changed for the better; we used to smart five years ago for what is now a charm." He laid his hand on his heart and bowed.

Margot laughed. "But the charm," said her friend, turning to her, "is one which apparently he does not possess."

"Oh, I will p-p-practise," said Tom quickly. The Lady Bienvenue had not spoken directly to him, nor did he look at her while he replied; but they seemed to interest each other, John thought, and Tom was certainly in the right vein: he had made an astonishing advance in a very short time, for this lady was not, like the other,

an old friend or enemy of childish days. On the contrary she was—but the tragic story that had seemed so real at midnight under the cold moon had now no more terror in it than any other ancient tale of the dead centuries; reality was here, where the warm sun lulled every feeling but those of youth and kindliness, and something sang in the blood with a music like that of the bees that hummed in myriads along the heather.

“You have not told us *your* name, sir,” said the Lady Bienvenue. She had neither Margot’s stature nor her rich voice, but John felt instantly, as she spoke to him for the first time, that he was receiving a command. Her small face with its dark-pencilled eyebrows and clear-cut features seemed to express a character of imperious refinement, and he hesitated to reply, feeling his wit too clumsy for what was demanded of him.

“My lord,” he began tentatively, looking towards Tom.

“You mistake,” said that young gentleman, “there are no lords here: my name is Stutterville, plain Thomelin Stutterville; and now I seem to remember you. Are you not John Armiger, and haven’t I seen you going about in the company of a monk? By the way, were you with him when he interrupted these ladies out shooting yesterday?”

John rebelled at this: the jest was a shameless one.

“That was not the first or the worst interruption they had to complain of,” he said.

"So it appears," replied Tom, quite unabashed; "the young Hollands seem to be staying here, with a squire who rather magnifies his office; but I understand that they do not intend to press their claim."

"Their father will be interested to hear that," retorted John.

"He will not hear it," said the other,—"no one will venture to tell him."

The Lady Bienvenue smiled serenely, but Margot's brow clouded and she made a diversion by springing up.

"Shall we make a start?" she asked; "we are losing the day."

The keepers were called, the ladies mounted, and the sport began. It was not very successful: the moor belonging to this manor was not a large one, though it formed part of an immense extent of heather and bracken, rolling away to the east over the Cleveland Hills. Part of the ground had been disturbed the day before, and the Arncliffe end, though it was better stocked and less steep than the rest, was deeper in heather and more marshy at the bottom, so that the ponies had no easy time of it, and were often quite unable to follow a good flight. But the day was perfect and the party very conveniently balanced—Stutterville attending on the Lady Bienvenue and Margot falling to John's share—so that all went well, and when the whole company climbed the slope again at noon and sat down to the dinner which was waiting for them, nothing

was heard but fervent, if commonplace, expressions of satisfaction.

They sat this time in a hollow among the high bracken, out of which Margot made four wide-brimmed hats.

"We are almost unrecognisable," said Tom, as he fitted one on and looked at the others.

"Very true," replied John; "I doubt if our best friends would know us."

Margot gave him a quick glance of understanding, but Tom ignored the remark. He was settling himself very comfortably in a kind of cushioned seat among the heather tufts.

"This is about as good a day as I have ever seen," he said.

"That, too, may prove to be very true," thought John: this time he did not say it aloud, for Margot's grey eyes were already speaking to his, and a very faint smile lit them for a moment. She looked away and a cloud followed: John wondered whether she was really thinking his thoughts, which included a considerable amount of misgiving. The company was well met, but the future lay in harder hands than theirs: it might be wise not to run on too fast.

"I don't see," remarked Tom, looking up into the cloudless sky, "why we shouldn't do this every day."

The Lady Bienvenue left the reply to her hostess. Margot laughed a little consciously.

"Don't you?" she said; "I'm afraid I do. I know this moor better than you. After these two days

there will be nothing on it till some kind neighbour has put the birds back again. Besides," she added, "you forget you are engaged to the Colvilles for to-morrow."

"How do you know that?" asked Tom in great surprise.

Margot smiled with mischievous enjoyment. "I know because they told me so."

"Are you going, too?"

She laughed outright. "Oh, no! they have more tact than that: they said the Hollands would be there, and asked us to come any other day we liked. You see they know nothing of our recent acquaintances the Stuttervilles."

"Recent!" said Tom indignantly. "I'll see Colville myself; what has the Hollands' business to do with him?"

At this moment a high falsetto shout was heard: it was the keeper hallooing in answer to some one on the ridge above. Margot rose to ask what the noise meant, and John sprang up to follow her.

"It is your friend," she said, turning to him as he scrambled up out of the hollow: and there in fact was the massive figure of Nicholas, white against the high line of the wood, and beginning to move towards them over the quivering purple of the long sun-burnt slope.

XX.

JOHN'S first thought was one of fear: some accident must have happened to Edmund. No other reason that he could think of would have hurried Nicholas out to follow them so far at the hottest time of the day, when an hour or two more would have brought them home to him in the ordinary course. Something of the same kind was no doubt passing through Tom's mind, too: his light manner was gone, and after a moment's reflection he turned away with a hasty word of excuse and started up the hill to meet Nicholas. He walked quickly, with his head bent; Lady Joan looked after him with unconcealed sympathy. In this mood her face lost the air of command and took on an expression of child-like gentleness. It was not only John who was touched by her look; he saw Margot's eyes dwell on her for an instant with adoring tenderness, and then glance round at him as if to see whether he, too, knew what beauty was.

They all three watched in silence—patiently at first, while Tom climbed the hill and Nicholas came more slowly down it: impatiently enough afterwards, when the meeting was accomplished and Tom appeared to be asking one question after another without thinking to relieve their anxiety.

At last he recollected them, turned, and waved

his hand, shouting: "It's all right; there's nothing the matter," and he and the monk came down the slope together, still talking earnestly.

"A letter from my father," he called out again, as he drew nearer, and added when he reached the little camp, "An end to our holiday: we must go south to-morrow."

A feeling of constraint gripped the whole party at once. The happy hour of romance and irresponsibility was over: the gay and gallant youth named Stutterville had vanished, and down the flowery path by which he had gone from them another had come, a grave and grown man, a Holland, one about whose affairs they could ask no questions, and to whom they could offer no sympathy: even John was tongue-tied in the presence of the two girls. Girls they were now: for the breath from the outer world, which had summoned their friend of a moment since to join the business of men, seemed to have taken from them half their power and confidence, and to have left them pathetically young and helpless. John looked at them with an impulse of protection, and then remembered that henceforward he belonged once more to the hostile party, and was, moreover, not in a position to think of protecting anybody.

"I think," said Tom to him, in the tone of one making a decision, "that you had better go on home at once with Nicholas: there will be a good many things to do."

"I am afraid," said Lady Joan, without looking at her friend, "it is time we were going, too."

Margot and John fell behind the others as they moved off. "It doesn't take long, does it," she said, "to turn you and me into servants again?" She nodded towards the mistress who had been her equal and her guest a moment ago.

"We need not grudge them that," John replied; "the same change turns *them* back into enemies."

"Does it?" she asked, and then added, almost to herself, "I wonder."

John wished he knew which way her thought was inclining. "Perhaps," he said, "you have not heard the whole story?"

The grey eyes looked reproachfully at him. "The story?" she said in a low voice. "You don't wish to keep that alive?"

"How could you think it?" he replied. "We should never meet again."

"To be quite frank," she said, "do you see how they are to meet again?"

"I do not; but—to be quite frank—I intend that they shall."

"I wonder if you are right."

He was surprised: her doubt was evidently serious. "Surely you hate these factions?" he asked.

"The story is an old one," she replied, "it ought to have been forgotten long ago: but I am afraid the division goes deeper than that."

“Deeper?”—the horror of last night was in his voice.

She looked at him with a quick flash of sympathetic approval.

“I know what you mean, but I am right, too. A crime may be repented, or forgiven, a difference of principle cannot.”

He thought for a moment, then stopped short and turned to face her, with an exclamation of dismay.

“No,” she said, “don’t ask me—I was dreaming: it is just a dream I have at times, that a horrible choice must be made between wronging one man or a whole nation. It is a nightmare,” she went on, looking earnestly at him, “and I am the only dreamer who suffers from it—remember that.”

“I understand,” said John, and they walked on again. But there came into his mind the recollection of the monk’s words: Nicholas, too, was the king’s man only “so long as he holds of his overlord.” He spoke his thought aloud.

“There are others who are troubled by that nightmare.”

“Not you?” she cried, with unmistakable apprehension in her voice.

“No, certainly not,” he answered quickly; “but you speak as if—— Would you not wish me to agree with you?”

“To hesitate, to change, to betray? When I

dream that you are all wrong, my only comfort is to feel that you believe yourselves right."

"We do," said John eagerly. "I should like to argue it with you."

She smiled faintly and shook her head. "No, one can't argue about such things."

"Then what can we do?"

"We can feel about them, and we can fight—if it comes to that."

"I don't think it will come to that—for us at any rate;" he pointed across the ridge, on which they were now walking, to the terrace-path where Lady Joan was waiting for her, and Tom was prolonging his farewell.

Margot's eyes grew soft as she looked. The cloud came back when she turned to him again. "You have forgotten what I was saying: a quarrel can be ended, but not a cause. We are still on opposite sides."

This was not exactly what John wished at parting: but there was comfort in it, too. As he went silently down the hill, while Tom developed his conjectures upon the meaning of their move, he realised the service this girl had done him. His eyes had been filled to confusion with the splendours and cruelties of the New June: he could now look beyond them—she had given him back the power to see the king.

XXI.

THE ceremony for which King Richard was gathering his partisans together was a singular one, characteristic of him and of no other monarch in our history. It was now seven years since the most intimate and trusted companion of his youth, Robert de Vere, had been hunted from the kingdom by Gloucester's faction: it was three since he had died in exile. That Richard should still remember his dead friend was surprising only to those who habitually misunderstood him: they refused to believe that a warm heart could beat under so many fantastic changes of apparel, or that a constant and deadly purpose could be the hidden warp upon which the ever-varying moods they saw were woven. But even to his nearest associates the method of this commemoration was unexpected, and the significance of it came as a revelation.

De Vere had been buried in Louvain, where he died; but by Richard's order the body had been secretly embalmed, and now, when he judged that his time had come, the king had decreed to the dead the public honours so long over-due. If he could not revoke death, he could at least annul the years—the most high, mighty, and puissant Prince, Robert, Earl of Oxford, Marquis of Dublin,

and Duke of Ireland, should lie in state, as if he had but yesterday departed out of this transitory life, and be laid to rest among his ancestors, as though he had never for a moment stooped his pride or fled from the country of his birth. It was not for the first or the last time that Richard so desired to call back yesterday.

It was long past midnight when the funeral procession began to move through the little town of Earl's Colne: the September moon had set, but the sky was bright with stars: the streets were full of a multitude of shadows, some motionless, some drifting from darkness to darkness, but all silent as the inhabitants of a voiceless world. Through the centre of the crowd, two and two, two and two, in a seemingly endless line, wound the train of mourners, visible only as a march of phantoms, for every one of them was covered from head to foot with a single long black robe, the hood of which was drawn so far forward as to bury the face entirely out of sight.

The space in front of the Priory was clear, and guarded by a company of archers: they, too, were all in black, and stood in a rigid square as motionless as the stone figures upon a reredos. Above them, minute by minute, a single bell clanged with a note of cold and lonely remembrance. But now the head of the procession had reached the west door: the tolling ceased, and when John in his turn drew near to enter, the *De*

Profundis was already being chanted within. He passed slowly up the sombre nave, where hanging lamps cast shadows of strange forms among the arches, and seemed rather to carve than to dissipate the solid darkness; but the choir was bright with long lines of candles, and before the high altar stood the bier in an island of light. Below it was an open grave; at one side of the grave knelt the king, all in black, but unhooded, and wearing a gold crown; at the other side, opposite to him, and also kneeling, was his nephew, the young Lord Thomas Holland, in full armour, with a long white mantle floating backwards from his shoulders.

The choir stalls, in the lowest of which John was placed, had been set aside for the mourners who headed the procession: rank and wealth were theirs, no doubt, but in this house of the dead there was nothing but their place to distinguish them from the crowd beyond the screen; all alike were black-robed, veiled, and silent. The office was sung by an unseen choir, placed behind curtains under the walls of the chancel; the voices were those of men, and it might have seemed easy to believe that they alone were living, and the rest of the church filled with the ghosts of a departed generation. But John was conscious of a very different impression, which grew more and more strongly upon him as the long service proceeded. He knew as he looked around him that among this silent and indisting-

uishable company, though they were clothed with garments of death and stood with their feet among tombs, there was beating a life that was more and not less full than the life of the daylight world. If they had no voices of their own, it was because a single voice, a single gesture, could speak for them all: if they had merged their individuality under this strange sameness of apparel, it was to symbolise the unity of the feeling which had brought them there. What, then, was that feeling?—for he knew, too, with a continually deepening certainty, that there was something more between these sombre figures than a community of sorrow: there was also an intense oneness of expectation. What was the secret prayer upon these dumb lips? For what were they looking, these veiled eyes that watched an open grave? He could not answer, though he knew that he himself was a sharer in their hope; a vague dread haunted him that he was in the presence of a spirit more terrible than death: evil and good it seemed to be at once, and he feared it, though he longed for the moment of its manifestation.

The night wore slowly away: after the *Miserere* came the solemn Responsory: after the Responsory the Matins for the Dead, with Nocturnes and Lauds: after the *Benedictus* the Antiphon of the Resurrection, the Prayer for Absolution, and the Celebration of the Mass. The candles were burning dim: the air of the church was cold and

earthy, but the pulse of expectation was beating higher and higher.

“Enter not into judgment,” prayed the Archbishop, standing at the foot of the bier; and a long silence followed the *Amen*. Then, like a ray of pure white light, a single voice of extraordinary power and beauty pierced the stillness of the shadows. “*Libera me, Domine,*” it sang, “*de morte eterna,*” and then the full choir closed round it: but all through the chant that one voice rang in John’s ears above the rest, and as he listened a vision came to him that was like a dream within a dream. A floating veil of incense ascended in dusky clouds against the blaze of the candles on the altar: behind it as it faded and renewed itself he saw another chancel and the light of a long past morning shining strangely clear upon a tablet of stone between a young man’s feet. “*Cor Ricardi Cor Leonis,*” said the wonderful voice, and John felt his own heart burn within him as it had burned when he heard it for the first time. Then the altar lights came back, the incense scattered, and the vision drifted away with it: he was here again in the Priory Church of Colne, and his eyes were set once more upon the two figures kneeling beside the grave. They were almost as formal and motionless as statues, but they had a beauty far beyond that of bronze or alabaster. Both were young and fair, and though the king was nearly ten years the elder of the two, the shorter and more rounded outline of his face and the royal

serenity of his large eyes gave him a strangely innocent expression. The other face was innocent too, but with the innocence of keen and concentrated energy: the hands were clasped as firmly as the armour against which they were relieved: the head was bowed, with the earnestness of watchful attention rather than of deep thought. For all their cold and monumental remoteness John was moved as he looked at the two: he had long loved them as men, and now as symbols he was ready to adore them; but when his thought turned from them for a moment to the grave which lay between, he felt that there was still some meaning in their presence that he had not fully understood.

While he was straying among such memories and thoughts the chant *In Paradisum* soared up and died away: when it ceased the kneeling figures rose in their places, while the Archbishop, standing before them, performed the Benediction of the Sepulchre and the sprinkling of holy water upon the dead. The moment of farewell was at hand, and John saw with a quick feeling of answered expectation that a change had come over the whole character of the ceremony: the Archbishop was indeed still repeating the words of eternal rest, but the king was standing above him by the open coffin with his face set in the stern calm resolve of an avenging angel. In the silence which followed he took the hand of his dead friend in his own, and

raised it slowly in the sight of all present; then turning towards the altar he held up with a solemn gesture a sapphire ring drawn from his own finger, pressed it home upon the dead hand, and bowed his head over the coffin in the attitude of one who whispers a message of supreme moment in the ear of a dying man. Not a sound reached even the nearest of those who stood there listening intently, but there were few who did not feel that they had heard that whispered message, and assented to the promise with which the king had pledged himself before heaven and in their sight.

From this moment until the end the consciousness of strong emotion was still with John; the remainder of the service seemed to pass over his head with the swift and melancholy intensity of an autumnal storm. But after the coffin had at last been lowered into the grave, and the face of the dead had disappeared for ever, the strain was gradually loosened, and the air lightened more and more quickly towards dawn. As the final *requiescat in pace* died away, gleams of misty sunlight began to weave a network of patterns along the chancel roof; the soft radiance grew rapidly brighter as it descended towards the canopies, and when the mourners rose to take their places once more in the procession, John felt as if all that was evil in the passion of that night must have fainted or fled before the hope and the ardour of the coming day. But the king's head, as he

passed close by him, was still erect and menacing: the look on his face, though calm, was still the look of one who remembers enemy and friend together.

XXII.

THE ceremonial was not yet ended nor was its symbolism complete. When the mourners left the church it was to take part in a scene at once strikingly contrasted with that from which they came, and as clearly one with it in tacit significance. The king had revealed the purpose to which he dedicated himself: he was now to commit it to the strength and loyalty of those who followed him.

Two by two, at the end of the nave, the black robes and hoods were cast aside, and the long line issued from the west door as a pageant of proud and almost overbearing magnificence. Part of the square was still in shadow, part was already white and warm with sunshine: it was thronged round the edges with a close-packed crowd of townsfolk, kept back as before by rigid lines of soldiery. But the archers, too, had now cast their black and added a frame of colour to the brilliance of the scene; two companies of them were blazing in scarlet, while the third wore the green that

Richard loved, with his badge of the white hart couchant upon it.

On the south side of the square, and full in the sunlight, a crimson carpet had been laid, with a raised dais and throne facing the east. Here Richard took his seat: by him stood the Archbishop, and on the steps below were six earls—Rutland, Kent, and Huntingdon to the right, and Oxford, Nottingham, and Salisbury to the left. At the farther end of the carpet twelve knights faced the throne, and in front of them stood the king's nephew in the bright armour and long white mantle which he had worn throughout the night. At a sign from Richard he approached and fell on his knees, the twelve knights also kneeling round him.

The king rose to his feet, and taking a sword with belt, buckle, and scabbard of gold from the hands of the Earl of Salisbury, he passed it to the Archbishop, who blessed it and handed it in turn to the nearest of the group of knights. Then Richard, taking a second sword from the Earl Marshal, laid the naked blade three times upon the young man's shoulder. "Arise, Sir Thomas," he said, with a voice of great clearness and solemnity. "Be faithful, brave, and fortunate."

The new-made knight raised his head, but made no other motion: for a moment the king and he looked deep into each other's eyes, and the spectators felt again the sudden thrill of an expectation beyond their experience. A moment more, and

Richard had fulfilled it to the utmost: he flung his right arm across his breast with a gesture of almost frenzied inspiration, and his voice rang through the farthest corners of the great square. "The sword, the sword! Gird thee with thy sword upon thy thigh!"

Sir Thomas rose, and the knights gathered closely round him. While they took his cloak from him and fastened on his sword and spurs, the excitement of the onlookers vented itself in shouts of enthusiasm. John would have cheered with the rest, but he had more than simple good feeling to express: for him the ceremony had touched deeper emotions which could not be so easily satisfied. He stood silent, but he was intensely alive to all that was passing, and his ear caught at once the marked difference between the character of the cries around him. The aimless good-humoured applause of the crowd outside seemed to have little or nothing in common with the concentrated vehemence of the voices near him, as they rang out again and again in a fierce unison that was strangely unlike any sound of rejoicing he had ever heard.

But now the scarlet archers drew in on both sides of the open space, and formed a lane down which the king passed on his way to his lodging. After him went the Archbishop and the six earls, and then the new-made knight in his bright naked armour, like the young St George. His twelve

companions were elsewhere, but his brother Edmund walked beside him, carrying his helm with eager pride. John stood looking after them; then the green company closed in and they were lost to sight.

Behind them streamed the rest of the brilliant assembly in much disorder, talking, commenting, discussing without measure or caution. John saw one or two make signs to him, but he walked on slowly and alone. He was almost the last to turn out of the square.

XXIII.

“AND yet we were silent,” said a voice immediately in front of him.

He knew, before he looked up, what he should see: the voice was unmistakable. At the mouth of the narrow street which he was upon the point of entering, the tall loose figure of his friend William, the singer, stood waiting for him,—waiting as naturally and confidently as though he had but a moment since stepped out before him from the chapel in All Hallows Church.

“I have seen you more than once since then,” said John, answering his own thought.

“Why not?” replied the other; “we are bees

of a swarm: and yet we were silent to-day when the rest buzzed."

His insistence and his assumption of equality roused John once more to a feeling of opposition.

"I was silent," he said, "for reasons of my own, not because my heart was not in the business."

William looked frankly at him from under his dark serious brows, without any consciousness of the intended rebuff.

"There are hearts and hearts," he replied; "the white hearts must not lie in the same bowl with the black and red."

"We lie where we are laid," said John shortly, "but I own that I hated some of the noise."

"Hurlewayne's own noise," said William; "what else would you hear from Hurlewayne's kin?"

The phrase was not new to John, and he knew well what was meant, but the word "kin" jarred and angered him: it seemed to confuse Tom with his relations.

"A man may be of one mind and his family of another," he said.

"Mad as I am I know that," replied the singer, "but I spoke of spiritual kindred."

"Then you spoke too soon," John retorted still more sharply; "what can you know of my lord's mind?"

"I know its pedigree," said the other with unruffled assurance, and then stopping suddenly opposite the entrance to an alley at the side of the

street, he took off his bonnet and bowed courteously. "This is my lodging," he said; "good day, sir, and forgive me if I have angered you."

He turned up the alley and strode away, but John was far too angry to let him go. The man had some power over him which he resented, and after the long strain of the night he was in the mood to continue a quarrel until he got some satisfaction that might soothe his irritated nerves.

He overtook his antagonist as he reached the farther end of the passage, where it widened into a tiny courtyard with a low paling that gave upon a field: in the centre stood a brick well-head. The house-doors were shut and the windows barred: the whole place seemed deserted.

The singer took his seat upon the edge of the well-head, and appeared to be lost in thought. John pulled himself together and steadied his voice.

"I have done you the justice," he began, "to suppose that there is some meaning in your words: men have paid a heavy price for less offensive language."

William rose as if he perceived his presence for the first time, and offered him a seat. John accepted it, hoping to obtain an advantage by taking the more dignified position; but he had no sooner sat down than the singer resumed his place on the opposite side, leaning easily with one hand upon the bricks behind him.

John was still making an effort at self-control,

and was all the angrier for it. "You will now be good enough to tell me," he said, "what you meant just now by the pedigree of my lord's mind."

The other looked very grave: his voice was slow and deep as he answered. "Is it not," he said, "the mind of a new-born man, a child, that is the son of Marland that is the son of Savage that is the son of Swynnerton that is the son of Holland that is the son of Death and Darkness?"

If John had understood the words he might well have been goaded even to violence; but the shock of astonishment with which he heard his own name where he least expected it, and the marvellous sad music of the voice which was speaking, took away all sense of irritation, and left him half puzzled and half touched. The sad voice continued still more earnestly, but in so low a tone as to seem hardly intended for John's ear at all. "By Him that bought me, it can never be my will to anger any man. O Richard, Richard, they that beget Death must feed Destruction, they and their brethren and their most sacred lords. This is more than truth to you, and you take it for less than nothing: you came to your kingdom before you knew yourself: crowned you were with a crown—what king under Heaven could have bought the like?—but you took counsel with the rere-mice that view the realm head downwards, and with the night-hawks that are strong only against the defenceless."

It was probably the voice that conquered John,

for he was always keenly alive to beauty of tone, but this time the words too moved him. He also loved Richard as this man loved him; he also hated the night-hawks, for he had flown with them once and shuddered to remember it. But between him and that recollection there now rose the sunlit figure of a saint in bright armour, girded with a sword that could never be drawn in any unjust quarrel.

"William," he said, "I was wrong to be angry, but you were wrong to say what you did. There may have been ill-doings, but my Lord Thomas knows nothing of them: he has never an evil thought in his head,—he is bent on making peace with his enemies at this moment; he will be the king's right arm. What is the sense of crying him down beforehand? He is the only chance we have, and you yourself called him 'new-born'—no one condemns a babe."

William looked up: his mood too seemed to have been changed by his companion's earnestness, but it was changed in the opposite direction, and a smile was broadening over his dark face. "No," he said, "we do not judge children, neither do we ask their advice."

John rose to go. "I know what you mean," he replied as he held out his hand, "but you may easily be too despondent: it is not always the oldest eyes that see clearest."

William accompanied him to the end of the alley,

but in silence; his downcast mood seemed to be returning.

"Cheer up," said John at parting. "At any rate wait to weep till the pitcher's broken. I believe you may yet see a young man make a better counsellor than many elder ones."

The smile reappeared for a moment round William's lips. "I may yet see a cow hop in a cage," he said, "but I shall not reckon upon it."

XXIV.

THE return journey to London occupied the best part of that and the following day, but the time slipped by without giving John any good opportunity for conversation with his master. Sir Thomas was possibly tired, certainly preoccupied, and the few remarks he made were all of arrangements for the immediate future, a period which seemed to be causing him very serious thought.

John had not forgotten that these arrangements, whatever they turned out to be, would certainly involve himself, and he pricked up his ears when, on the morning after their return to the New June, he received an order to accompany his lord as far as Friday Street, where Sir Thomas intended to call upon his father the Earl of Kent.

For some time John waited in the hall; he talked with some of Lord Kent's squires, but all the time he was wondering vaguely how far the result of the conference would be in accordance with his own wishes; for he had learnt enough philosophy to be prepared for a good deal of disappointment at the hands of the great. Tom would certainly wish to do well by him; but Tom would have a hard bargain to drive for himself, and not too much thought to spare for others.

Nearly an hour had gone by when he was summoned at last. He saw as he entered the room where father and son were alone together that his apprehensions were justified: the old man looked agitated, the young one furious. Lord Kent gave John the scantest greeting, and called past him to the squire who had ushered him in to send a messenger to Lord Huntingdon, requesting the favour of his immediate presence.

The door was hardly closed again when Tom rose to his feet. "You must forgive me, father," he said in his shortest and quickest manner, "but if my uncle comes I go. I thought you and I might have managed our own affairs for once."

He turned before he left the room. "John," he said, "my father has been good enough to make me very generous offers: I leave you to accept them for me, but on one condition only; about that, remember, I can admit no interference, and you may tell my uncle so."

He was gone without a look behind him. Lord Kent's face relaxed to something like a grim smile; he shrugged his shoulders and turned to John.

"Tell his uncle!" he growled with some humour. "Ay! tell him, do!"

John smiled discreetly. "I can hardly inform him of what I do not know," he said.

"Don't tell me that," cried the old lord, frowning again. "You know well enough, I'll be bound: I offer Sir Thomas an establishment of his own, and he wants a marriage with it—a marriage that is not mine to give, nor the king's either."

"Perhaps the lady's father——" John began diplomatically.

"Don't play the fool with me, sir," cried the old lord. "You know as well as I do that the lady has no father."

"Her brother, then," said John.

"Her brother and mine are not on speaking terms."

"The marriage would be an opportunity for reconciliation."

Lord Kent shook his head gloomily. "You ought to know my brother better than that," he said; "besides, it takes one to begin a feud, but two to end it."

John thought he perceived a certain weakening of the resistance.

"My lord," he said in his most persuasive tone, "may I suggest—is it not almost certain—that on a proposal from you Lord Stafford would——"

The earl looked very uneasy: his eyes dropped, and when he raised them again it was not to face John.

"The thing is impossible," he said. "Whatever I do I must think of my brother's feelings first. I should offend him mortally by such a suggestion. But there is something in your idea, no doubt," he added, looking fixedly at John once more, "and when my lord arrives I shall be glad to hear you put it forward."

John's consternation showed plainly in his face,—the risk was to be all his, the profit everybody else's; but before he could speak Lord Huntingdon was announced.

John retired to the end of the room while the two brothers exchanged greetings and sat down to talk. They spoke at first of other business, and he had time to reflect upon the dangers of his position: he looked at the great men opposite him as a grain of corn might be supposed to look at the huge millstones between which it was about to pass. Their appearance fascinated him—they were now so unlike, and yet they must once have been so like one another. Both were big men of fine presence; both had the fair complexion, the hooked nose, the broad forehead, the prominent cheek-bones, and the sharp chin, too small for symmetry: but even in these points there was a characteristic difference over all. Huntingdon was the red, Kent the yellow variety of the type; the one was florid, full-fed and choleric, an image of physical force,

while the other with his drooping moustache and his pale beard divided into two small points after the fashion of the day, made but a weak and sickly effect beside him, and the contrast was heightened, both for good and evil, by Kent's superior refinement and a crafty look that peeped and was gone again like a lizard in a broken wall. Both, it is needless to say, had more attractive aspects; but none of them were present to John's mind in this interval of apprehension.

Another moment and he found himself in the act of going through the mill. When he came to the name "Stafford," Lord Huntingdon's face turned from red to purple with a suddenness that was almost alarming, and John saw that the elder brother had marked the change with a quick furtive glance: he too, it was clear, had his apprehensions. When the proposal was at last fully before them it was Kent who at once declared it to be impossible.

"I have heard something of this already," he said to his brother, "and I can only repeat that from my point of view the idea is quite intolerable: the Staffords are enemies, and there it ends: I will be no party to asking anything of them."

Huntingdon had lost his hectic colour, but the heavy rings under his eyes remained darker than usual, and he was evidently finding the question an uncomfortable one.

"Body of God!" he said, "why must you send for me?"

"You have brought the boy up these ten years," replied Kent, "and in a matter of such importance I should naturally wish to hear your opinion."

Huntingdon uttered a contemptuous snort. "My opinion of the Staffords is that they are like pigs—more savoury dead than alive. I care little who knows it," he added, as he saw John start. His brutality was no new thing to one who had lived five years in the New June, but this time it was so shameless that even a squire must make some sign of revolt. John felt the indignant blood rush to his eyes.

"But I, my lord," he exclaimed hotly, "I care very much who knows it: and if your opinion is to be reported to Sir Thomas, I beg that you will choose some other messenger."

Huntingdon had a certain liking for John; he did not resent his rebellious tone, but he looked at him with callous and deliberate contempt. "What ails Sir Thomas?" he sneered.

Lord Kent intervened. "It appears that he has seen the girl."

His brother laughed, a boisterous cold-hearted laugh. "Love?" he cried. "That's soon settled: send him abroad—he can finish my Jerusalem jaunt for me."

Lord Kent seemed thunderstruck by the suggestion. "But what of this business of Richard's?" he asked in a lower tone.

"It won't ripen yet: if it does he can turn back, as I did."

He took up his gloves and slapped them upon his palm. "Leave it to me," he said; "I'll give him reasons."

When he had left the room Lord Kent sank back into his seat, a figure of dejection.

"A year!" he groaned; "I may be gone before that."

John looked at his dull eyes and shrunken yellow skin, and thought that he might not be far wrong: his disease was no secret in the household.

"My lord," he said very earnestly, "could you not at least approach Lord Stafford?"

The old lord did not even raise his head. "I have done it," he replied, "and he refused us: a boy of eighteen! for God's sake don't tell Huntingdon."

PART III.

LIGHT IN THE EAST

XXV.

THE future had tumbled about John's ears: not one stone was left upon another, and for a day and a night he struggled breathlessly among the ruins. Then the old lord sent for him again.

"John," he began, "you are a man of some ambition, and possibly of some sense. At any rate, I am going to work on that assumption." He spoke firmly and with no trace of dejection.

"Yesterday," he continued, "was one of my bad days: we had to acknowledge a check, and I was troubled, for I have only a certain time before me, and none to waste on unnecessary delays."

"I don't understand," replied John, "at least I hope not."

The Earl smiled faintly at this well-meant effort. "Thank you," he said, "but I would rather you looked facts in the face. I am a doomed man; but I am not a dead man, and I don't mean to wear a shroud while I can still use a sword. I shall build as if I had a long lease, and if I drop, Tom must carry on: that means that the sooner he gets his training done the better."

He paused and gave John a searching look. "What did you make of the Colne affair?" he asked.

John felt uncomfortable. Something in the crafty eyes of the questioner brought back the shadows of that night. Instinctively he summoned to meet them the recollection of the morning sun that had put them to flight.

"I thought Sir Thomas was splendid," he replied; "he looked like a picture of St George."

The Earl probably despised this touch of enthusiasm: but he observed with perfect impartiality all human weaknesses, since they were all possible opportunities for his own cool hand.

"Well, well," he said, not ungenially, "saint or no, I thought myself that he made a rather striking figure of a young prince."

"He did indeed," answered John quickly, and then flushed, as he realised that he had assented before he had fully understood. He glanced at the Earl, but saw only a mask of innocence.

"The king destines his nephew for an important part in his scheme of reorganisation; the arrangements are already made, but will take some time longer to mature; we have perhaps a twelvemonth at our disposal. I was a little startled when my brother Huntingdon suggested a long voyage—a man in my position does not care to lose sight of his immediate successor. But the successor to great affairs must be one who has seen the like: Sir

Thomas must be shown something of other kingdoms and their government."

The mask continued to stare innocently in John's face.

"I daresay," the Earl went on, "you have heard all about Henry of Derby's two voyages."

This time John started outright. "But my Lord of Derby——" he began, and stopped short.

"The cases are not perhaps entirely parallel, but what is the point at which you find the comparison so impossible?"

This time John had seen the danger ahead; he bolted hurriedly down the most obvious by-path.

"My Lord of Derby took three hundred men—quite a small army—with him," he said, in as natural a tone as he could muster.

The Earl was not likely to have missed the dexterity of the turn, but his look was still one of perfect unconsciousness.

"Very true," he said, "Sir Thomas would gain nothing in Prussia or Barbary: war against savages is no lesson for a Prince. In the end, you may remember, Derby himself sent his army home, and went to Jerusalem—like any other gentleman of his rank."

"Jerusalem——" John was in the dark now, and hesitated to commit himself.

"Yes," said the Earl briskly, "Jerusalem: that includes, of course, France, Milan, Venice, and anything else you please. You will go straight out,

as fast as you can travel, and pay all your visits on the way back: so that for the last two-thirds of the time you will be constantly nearer home and more within reach of a possible summons from England."

John bowed: the idea began to gain upon him, and without forgetting his castle in the air, so lately ruined, he began at once to make a fresh one. The new towers would take longer in building, but they would be loftier, and their inhabitants would be the same.

The old lord seemed to hear his thoughts. "It is natural and right that you should have your ambitions," he said, "only remember that the better you serve my ends the better you serve your own. So the future will bring its rewards with it; but in the meantime I must put you into a position where you can do what I expect of you."

John's heart beat fast, and once more the other's instinct dogged its galloping.

"Yes, you will be a knight—when my son attains his full rank: while he is Sir Thomas you are plain John Marland. But I can do something for you at once."

He took a paper from the table and handed it to John, whose eye was instantly caught by the word "Curia" written large at the head of a long list of offices. The Earl commented aloud as he went through them.

"The expense will be considerable, no doubt,"

he began, "but the king's nephew must travel with as good a household as his cousin of Derby, though he need not make himself ridiculous with a toy army. The Steward and Chamberlain must be knights, and of some standing—I suggest Sir Hugh Dolerd and Sir Walter Manners. You may take your choice of the other places."

John read the list through a second time: in the first column, after the Steward and Chamberlain, came the Receiver-General, the Treasurer, the Auditor, and the Controller of the Household; the Butler and the Lord's Clerk or Secretary; the Almoner, the Herald, and the Chaplain and Confessor. He passed to the second column, and found there the various valets, with or without pages, the clerks to the wardrobe, buttery, spicery, and kitchen, the minstrels, henchmen, physicians, surgeons, barbers, cooks, and waferers. His face fell: he turned back to the beginning once more, and the blood mounted to his temples. Lord Kent watched him with a smile, but left him to speak for himself.

"My lord," said John at last, "I am sorry to find here no place in which I can serve Sir Thomas—or any one else."

"If you had," said the Earl, "we should have bid you good day."

He took the paper from John's hand and turned it over: on the back was written "John Marland to be Master of the Horse and Marshal in Hall."

"When you are moving continually," he said,

ignoring John's expression of thanks, "the two offices go very well together: the arrangement worked satisfactorily, I believe, in Derby's voyage."

John acquiesced with decision.

"You will draw knight's wages," added Lord Kent in a flattering and sympathetic tone.

John bowed as stiffly as he could. "I understand by that that I am to be accountable only to Sir Thomas?"

"Certainly," replied the Earl, "and will you now ask Sir Thomas to speak to me."

His crafty eyes followed John with satisfaction as he left the room. The new Marshal's feeling was less clear: it was not until he had put some distance between the old lord and himself that his rise in life brought him any sense of exhilaration. Even then he would have given both his offices and all his pay for the smallest pair of gilded spurs.

XXVI.

THE remainder of the month went by in a whirl of preparation, for on the 1st of October the expedition was to start.

A longer time might have proved necessary, but every one showed goodwill, and everything worked with unexpected smoothness. To begin with, Sir

Thomas, to his Marshal's surprise, raised no objection whatever to the proposed voyage: he made, however, two requests of his father—first, that his brother Edmund should travel with him, and second,—it was by no means second in his own mind,—that he should not leave England without saying good-bye to Lady Joan.

To John's further astonishment, both concessions were granted at a word. As to Edmund—well, the old lord had been long accustomed to the absence of both his sons for a great part of the year; but after what had lately passed between him and young Lord Stafford, any further communication with that family might have seemed utterly impossible. Perhaps Lord Kent had other motives of his own, perhaps he felt his self-respect concerned in doing something to retrieve his late defeat: in any case, he succeeded in bringing about the desired meeting on neutral ground and with every appearance of accident. As far as any one could see, it was what he had calculated it would be, a formal and ineffectual occasion: in the presence of a dozen onlookers, some hostile and all vigilant, the lady was ice and the lover stone. But even icebergs and rocks are not always so inanimate as they appear: their voices are heard among them, and say much that is lost to the uninitiated ear. Besides, there is always one unwatched moment; and barriers may fall in a moment which years could not build up again. Probably Lord Kent's vigilance was less

successful than he believed. Something at any rate escaped him, for he would have been surprised to hear the message which Tom delivered to his Marshal on the evening of their crossing, as they leaned together on the stern bulwark of the ship and watched the white cliffs shrinking into the distance.

"I say, John," he began in his abrupt way, "I can tell you now. She sent you her good wishes, and hoped that you would always love what she loved, and hate what she hated. I was not to say that until we had left England."

"I don't understand," replied John, "it sounds so unlike her."

"Unlike her!" exclaimed Tom; "what do you mean? Unlike whom?"

"Well, whom were you speaking of?"

"My good man, whom should I be speaking of?—Lady Joan, of course."

John reflected hotly on the egotism of the great; not recognising that in certain moods all men are alike.

His lord pursued him remorselessly. "I see how it is, John,—you were wrapped up in your own concerns: if by chance it was Margaret Ingleby you were thinking of, I can give you a message from her too."

"Can you?" asked John.

"I told her you were to be my Master of the Horse, and she said, 'What a splendid title; but

it won't sound quite so well in Palestine, where all the horses are asses!'" His laugh was intentionally loud. John ground his teeth in silence; angry as he was, he saw that it would never do to quarrel on a point like this: the suggested nickname might be fastened upon him for the remainder of the voyage.

"I say," inquired Tom in the cheery manner of youth, "you're not hurt, are you?"

"Not at all," replied the Master of the Horse, laying an ambush in his turn. "I was thinking over what Lady Joan said: as coming from her, of course it is more intelligible."

"Very good of you to say so," remarked Tom complacently: it was pleasant as well as intelligible that his lady should wish his dependents to love him—above all to love him as she did,—a very happy phrase.

John had his antagonist beneath his foot now.

"Good lord!" he exclaimed, "you don't suppose we are all talking of Sir Thomas Holland, do you?"

"No, I don't," replied Tom in confusion; "but Lady Joan certainly——"

"Certainly not," said John; "you are completely mistaken. Lady Joan was referring to a conversation I had with Margaret Ingleby that day on the moor in Yorkshire."

"How do you know that?" asked Tom.

"It was about the king and the Duke of Gloucester."

"Why should she mean them rather than——" he hesitated.

"Rather than your lordship?" said John. "Well, then, why should she ask you to say nothing till we were out of England?"

Tom's pride struggled hard.

"I don't believe you are right," he persisted.

The Master of the Horse gave the *coup-de-grâce*. "We'll ask your brother," he said, looking about him towards the crowded end of the deck. "I am to love what Lady Joan Stafford loves, and hate what she hates—that's the riddle, isn't it? And you say the answer is——"

Complete surrender followed, and then peace. Each had escaped a dangerous moment, and though they often spoke afterwards of Lady Joan, and sometimes of Margaret, the message and the jest were never heard of again. But they had done their work: they had come to the mill where all is grist that will feed the unresting wheels.

XXVII.

THE young men enjoyed their long journey across Europe, and considered it a new experience. Certainly it abounded in small novelties, but in any wider sense it was really less of a change than they

had expected. France they had visited before: they spoke French after a fashion, and numbered plenty of Frenchmen among their friends or acquaintance. Of Italy they knew less; but they had trafficked with Florentine bankers, worn Milanese armour, and drunk Venetian wines. Tom and Edmund had even a strain of Italian blood, drawn from that Alasia di Saluzzo who had married a FitzAlan some generations back. It is true that the landscape of the South was unfamiliar to them; but they were of an age to think more of men and manners than of landscape, and there has always been a great sameness in the blend of obsequiousness and inefficiency which the wealthy traveller encounters along his route. From hostelry to hostelry, from abbey to abbey they went, with no more and no less monotony than would have attended a journey at home. The hospitality of Courts would have provided more variety, but that was not to be their portion on the outward route: Sir Thomas was travelling almost incognito, and they seldom passed two nights under the same roof. In short, they kept very much to themselves, and carried England with them in their little Curia of forty souls: their thoughts, their talk, their jests were English, they rode on English horses all day, got their songs and sermons from William the Singer and Nicholas Love, ate and drank in the English fashion all evening and dreamed English dreams all night, till at the end of ten weeks they rode into Mestre in the

December twilight and looked across the cold dead water of the lagoon.

Indoors they found Sir Hugh Dolerd and his men, who had been sent ahead to make arrangements for the passage to Jaffa. The Senate, on receipt of Sir Thomas Holland's application, backed by a letter from King Richard himself, had been pleased to grant him the use of the *Veniera*, a galley commanded by Ser Santo Venier, which had just returned from the ordinary winter pilgrimage: they had also voted a sum of two hundred and fifty ducats for presents to the young lord. Sir Thomas was delighted: but John smiled to himself over the discovery which he made soon after, that the Earl of Derby's claims on a similar occasion had been assessed at fifty ducats more. He persuaded the Treasurer of the Household to make a note of these figures in the margin of his accounts for the information of Lord Kent on their return to England. Tom was too innocent of royal ambitions to need rebuke.

The horses and more than half the company were left behind at Mestre to wait in winter quarters for their lord's return from Palestine. The more important members of the household accompanied Sir Thomas to Venice, where a lodging had been provided for them on the Riva, conveniently placed between the Piazza and the Arsenal, where the *Veniera* was lying. Her refit had been some time in progress, and in another fortnight she would be ready for sea.

Meanwhile there was Venice, strange and beautiful even in December. The travellers went busily about their buying and their sight-seeing. They were never tired of exploring the high romantic labyrinth of the canals, where they found a childish pleasure in the long silences, broken suddenly by the musical cry of the boatmen and the swirl of the water at a sharp corner; or they floated idly by the island of San Giorgio at the unforgettable moment when the Ave Maria bell rings over the breathless lagoon, and watched the winter sunset burning the ripples from gold and blue into orange and purple, and then leaving them in an instant to fade from wan yellow and white through silver and cold grey into the final mystery of darkness.

Perhaps for one day their delight was unconscious: certainly before two days were over they realised how great a distance they had come. Their old life lay far behind them and across a gulf, for at Venice they were more than half-way towards the East.

XXVIII.

ON the 22nd of December the weather suddenly changed. Up to this time it had been remarkably warm and still, but a keen wind now began to blow from the north-west, which, as Ser Santo

pointed out, was good for nothing but a run down the Adriatic. The travellers agreed to make the best of it as he advised, hastily added to their store of warm clothing, took farewell of their magnificent Senatorial friends, and went on board the galley, which was now lying off the Lido Channel, some miles out of Venice. On the day before Christmas Eve, the same being a Thursday, the *Veniera*, with a steady breeze behind her, set sail for Zara.

The Jaffa voyage usually took about six weeks: the time was unnecessarily prolonged by the frequent calls made at such ports as Ragusa, Corfu, and Modon, with the double object of amusing the pilgrims, to whom this trip was probably the event of a lifetime, and of giving the ship's crew opportunities of selling the contents of the pedlar's bundle which every man on board was allowed to take with him. But the *Veniera* was now hindered by no considerations of this kind: speed was her object; she carried a single party of a dozen instead of her usual motley crowd of passengers, and her crew were picked men highly paid; above all, the *provenza* continued to blow day after day, to the immense and unconcealed pride of the young *patrono*, who seemed at times to regard this good fortune as a tribute to his own seamanship, and at times to accept it with superb humility as one more favour from heaven to the ducal family of Venier. Which-ever it may have been, it brought the *Veniera* safely to Jaffa within five weeks.

She arrived, too, at an opportune moment: the *Sabbatino* or Deputy-Governor of Jerusalem had come down to Jaffa on affairs of his own, and was on the point of returning home. He had had a very prosperous season of extortion with the last regular batch of pilgrims, and saw his advantage in encouraging others to come, like Sir Thomas, between the ordinary winter and summer sailings. For a comparatively reasonable price he offered to escort the Englishmen to Jerusalem himself. Ser Santo, who had a special licence from the Signory to accompany the travellers on land, closed with the offer at once, and in two days' time the whole party were safely lodged in Mount Sion with the Hospitallers of St John. To the great relief of at least one pilgrim, the animals provided for the journey were in this case all horses.

XXIX.

THE nine days which he spent in Jerusalem John found to be the weariest of his life. The way of the sight-seer is always hard; it is doubly so when a continual demand is made not only on his attention and admiration, but on the highest imaginative power, the deepest emotion, and the most heroic credulity of which he is capable. Many of the

scenes which the pilgrims visited were beautiful, and in some their feelings were rightly touched: but the true moments were but moments in long hours of standing and staring, while every sense was deadened by the mechanical patter of their dragomen and the pitiless hurry in which they were shepherded from one to another of the innumerable holy places. Above all, John never forgot the misery of the three almost sleepless nights which he and his companions spent, according to the universal custom, in the Church of the Sepulchre. The filth and squalor surrounding the place, the insolence of the Moslem officials who locked them in at night and let them out in the morning, the greed and triviality of the friars who acted as showmen of the most sacred spot on earth, and the ceaseless quarrels of the nine Christian sects who inhabited it—all these were bad, but they were not the worst. Depressing beyond everything else was the feeling of utter disillusionment, the sense of groping in an underworld of frauds and counterfeits, where even the little that might really have been priceless was lost among monstrous fictions, or heaped over with tawdry ornament.

It was a very dispirited company that sat in the upper chamber of the Hospital on the last night of their stay. The room had been given up for their sole use by the courtesy of the Prior of St John, but they had hitherto spent very little time in it: this evening, when they had finally escaped from

their guides, and had a few hours left to themselves, they were sitting together in front of a small fire and taking a very sober retrospect of the week.

"If you ask me," said Sir Hugh, the Steward, "I say, under correction of Dom Nicholas, that the whole thing is little better than a peep-show at a fair."

"Don't," said Edmund in a low voice: he laid a hand appealingly on Sir Hugh's knee, and his eyes glistened in the dim candle-light almost as if there were tears in them.

Nicholas looked at him with great affection: then moved his chair briskly, and took up the Steward's challenge in as cheerful a tone as was possible without arousing suspicion.

"I know what Sir Hugh means," he began, "but I confess that I for one am very glad to have been here. We have seen many things that we shall never forget."

"Certainly," said Sir Thomas with approval,— "many things that were well worth seeing."

"I don't know what they are," rejoined Sir Hugh; "the only thing I cared to see, these infidel dogs refused to show me. They say there are a thousand lamps always kept burning in that big mosque of theirs: I should like to have counted them."

Sir Thomas continued to make the best of his expedition. "I daresay those lamps are just as visible outside as inside: about as genuine as the rock from which Mohammed ascended into heaven."

"The mosque is real at any rate," persisted Sir Hugh, "and they ought to show it."

"What has impressed you most, Sir Walter?" Nicholas asked the Chamberlain.

"The river Jordan, I think: I brought away a jarful for the christening of my next grandchild."

"You have forgotten the walls," said his lord; "you remember we thought the view of them very fine from outside."

"The Church at Bethlehem," added John, "seemed to me the most beautiful building I had seen since we left Venice."

"But none of those things," argued Sir Hugh, "are what we came to see: none of them are in Jerusalem."

"N-no," said Edmund quickly, his eyes lighting up for a moment, "b-but Godfrey de Bouillon's sword is, and that is real enough."

"It was once," murmured the monk half to himself.

"Come, Nicholas," said Tom, "you haven't told us your own choice yet: you are not one of the disappointed ones?"

Nicholas looked up, and John saw that his face had taken the frank impenetrable expression which generally served as a mask for his ironical mood.

"Disappointed? not I," he replied; "I thought everything quite genuine—transparently genuine: and yesterday I caught a glimpse of the Holy Land itself."

Tom looked puzzled. "Yesterday?—I thought you were with us."

"I was at the Place of Wailing."

"So were we," said Tom, "but I saw no view—except a view of some miserable Jews howling."

"I liked those Jews," Edmund remonstrated; "they wail outside the wall because if they went into the mosque they might tread upon the place where the Holy of Holies used to stand, without knowing it."

Tom ignored this plea. "By the way," he said to Nicholas, "I meant to ask you if you knew what it was they were groaning into the wall."

"It was the seventy-fourth Psalm."

The words seemed to convey no very exact information to any of the company, except perhaps to William the Singer, who leaned forward to listen from his place outside the circle.

Nicholas turned to John. "My Lord knows it better as *Ut quid Deus*," he said, "but it is worth hearing even in English." He began to recite it in a quiet tone that had more sadness than passion in it.

"O God, wherefore art thou absent from us so long: why is thy wrath so hot against the sheep of thy pasture?"

"O think upon thy congregation, whom thou hast purchased and redeemed of old.

"Think upon the tribe of thine inheritance, and Mount Sion, wherein thou hast dwelt."

He paused, and there was a moment's silence.

"It has a fine sound," said Sir Thomas at last, "but it doesn't come well from the Jews. They reap what they sowed, and then complain of it. I hate that."

"Yes," replied the monk, "we naturally hate and despise Jews almost as much as we hate and despise our baser selves. But they have their use: they have expressed national repentance in a very convenient form."

"Convenient for those who need it," said Sir Thomas, "but no other people have ever rejected their Redeemer."

"No," replied Nicholas, "we will not compare our case with theirs. Perhaps I did not mean to say 'convenient.'"

The irony entered deep into John's soul: he understood, if no one else did, the tremendous accusation that lay behind the plain words and simple tone; how could he endure to sit by in silence and hear his boy-lord blunder into an argument, which, as he knew only too well, needed very wary fighting.

"I don't think you have quite taken Nicholas's point," he broke in,—“not that we need discuss it here, but I know that he has a fixed idea about the condition of England just now: he thinks the ruling class are oppressive and lawless and revengeful. He seems to me to forget that there are times when a man must strike, and strike hard too, if he is to do his duty at all. But we

need not talk about it now,—it has nothing to do with this country.”

Tom saw no reason for cutting the argument short—it rather interested him. “I daresay there is something in what he says, John,” he remarked; “you and I have seen some pretty hard cases lately. But times will mend soon; and if you won’t mind my saying so, Nicholas, I think you mustn’t expect us to take so clerical a view as you do of these matters.”

“Forgive me,” replied the monk; “it is the wailing of those poor Jews that has got into my head.

“O deliver not the soul of thy turtle-dove unto the multitude of the enemies, and forget not the congregation of the poor for ever.

“Look upon the covenant; for all the earth is full of darkness and cruel habitations.

“Forget not the voice of thine enemies: the presumption of them that hate thee increaseth ever more and more.”

Sir Thomas reddened: the point was plain enough now, and he thought his chaplain was pressing him too far.

“My dear Nicholas,” he began, with some attempt at severity, “you should remember that if you love England, so do we; and some of us feel strongly that the real patriot is the man who believes the best of his country.”

“Ah!” replied the monk in the candid tone of one forced to an admission, “certainly the Jewish patriots never did that: they knew the worst, and could only hope the best, of theirs.”

John made an impatient movement at this renewal of the attack. Sir Thomas misinterpreted the gesture as agreeing with his own thought.

"I cannot see," he replied to Nicholas, "why you keep dragging in the Jews. Their history is very good, of course, for clerical purposes—for teaching and preaching and that sort of thing, and we know that it was written for our edification; but as a matter of record the Jews themselves seem to me to come very badly out of it. And whatever they may have been once, you cannot be serious in comparing them with us—now. Look at our wealth, our dominions, our famous battles and naval victories,—look at our position in Europe——"

"Think of our beautiful forests," Edmund chimed in, "and all our castles and cathedrals."

"Besides," added his brother, with an argumentative rise in the pitch of his tone, "how can the Jews of to-day understand anything at all of patriotism when they don't own an acre of land: they *have* no country."

"But they seek one to come."

The deep tones fell upon the altercation and silenced it, as if by irresistible authority: on the outer edge of the circle stood William the Singer, of whose very presence every one had been oblivious. As they now turned and looked at him in astonishment he seemed to be changed—the same, and yet wholly changed, as a wandering king might be who should suddenly reveal himself without bodily put-

ting off his disguise. His dark eyes looked beyond the company before him with a sombre glow in their depths: his right hand was half-raised, half-outstretched, and his head bent a little forward, as if he were speaking to some one too far distant to hear his voice but too near his heart for silence to be any longer possible.

“You that are lords of England and masters of manhood, for what will you sell the birthright of your sons? For a little earth, ye that have earth enough: for a little gold, ye that have gold already: for one more cup of wine before the lights go out—wine of oppression, wine of hatred, wine of anger, red wine of strength without softness and of fire without comfort: What think ye to leave behind you? What is it that ye heap up with the labour of giants? Kingdoms of dust, cities and walls of dust: dust for the hungry, dust for the thirsty, dust for the portion of all your children’s children. O Jerusalem, dream of the world, visit now the eyes of these men, that they may love thee and live. For the folk and realm that serveth not thee shall perish: yea, those heathen men shall be destroyed by wilderness. But the sons of them that made thee low shall come low unto thee, and all they that despised thee shall worship the steps of thy feet, and they shall call thee the city of the Lord, the Zion of the Holy One of Israel. Whereas thou hast been forsaken and hated so that there was none that passed by thee, God shall make thee an

eternal excellency, a joy of many generations. He shall also make thy officers peace and thine exactors rightfulness. Violence shall no more be heard in thy land, neither destroying nor defiling within thy coasts, but Health shall occupy thy walls and thy gates Praising."

His voice trembled to the close with so tender and self-forgetful a passion that John, who knew it of old, felt an unreasonable weakness blind his eyes for a moment. His companions were all moved, each in his own degree of sensitiveness: it was for Sir Thomas to relieve the general discomfort.

"William," he said, with a sternness half intended for his own encouragement, "I think you have forgotten yourself: we shall be glad to see you again when you have slept off your excitement."

The singer went out quietly as if of his own motion. At the door he turned and bowed with a simple dignity which made matters worse rather than better for those who remained. The Controller of the Household rose and kicked his chair out of his way. "Half Lollard and half madman, I should say," he growled to his neighbour, Sir Walter.

"I thought they were one and the same thing," replied the Chamberlain, and added in a lower voice, "I never understood why they brought the fellow."

John overheard him. "It was my doing," he said fiercely: he did not know with whom he was most angry.

XXX.

THE *Veniera's* return voyage was hardly less prosperous than her outward run: her oars were seldom needed, and by the 18th of March she was once more lying in the Arsenal at Venice, ready to refit in haste for the ordinary spring pilgrimage. Letters from England were waiting for the travellers. The earlier ones brought no news of importance; but a later packet contained some guarded instructions to John from the Earl of Kent, and gave an account of the situation at home. Affairs were moving, but with extreme slowness: Richard was more firmly set than ever upon his proposed marriage with the young Princess Isabel of France, while the Duke of Gloucester continued to protest violently, in private and in public, against any such alliance. His view was popular with the poorer lords and knights, whose livelihood depended largely upon a renewal of the French war; but there was little sign of any positive disloyalty among them, and on the whole the king appeared to be getting the best of the game, for he was at any rate going forward. The Earl Marshal and the Earl of Rutland had been appointed ambassadors to Paris, with full powers to treat for the marriage, and Gloucester had not ventured to press his opposition beyond the use of bad language—a foolish

method, for it left in Richard's hands the power of choosing his own time for calling his adversary to account. In short, Lord Kent was satisfied with the trend of events, and saw no reason at present why his sons should cut short their Italian tour.

So far the letter was evidently intended for the information of Sir Thomas, as well as his Master of the Horse, to whom it was addressed as to a confidential servant practically in charge of his young lord. It contained, however, an enclosure, marked for John's private perusal, and to be destroyed as soon as he had read it. John saw at once that the longer he delayed about this the more likely was his position to become embarrassing: if he could get even half an hour to himself he could master the contents of the document, put them beyond the reach of any one else, and decide on the line to take in replying to Sir Thomas, who had seen the enclosure when the letter was opened, and would be certain to inquire the meaning of it. He accordingly made a hasty excuse, and ran out of the house without giving any one a chance of stopping him even for a moment.

It was still early in the day, and the Riva was plentifully sprinkled with people of both the idle and the busy varieties; it was no place for a man who desired privacy. John walked at his best pace towards the Piazza, for he remembered that until he reached the angle of the Doge's Palace there was

no available turning for a man on foot, and he was still afraid of being overtaken by one or other of his companions. He went so fast as to cause a good deal of inconvenience to two well-dressed Italians, who had followed him from the first moment of his exit from the house.

He was not to escape them for long. At the entrance of St Mark's he found himself in a crowd through which he could only pick his way with some difficulty: this entanglement, which he welcomed as tending to secure him against his friends, delivered him into the hands of his actual pursuers, of whose existence he was ignorant. They skirted the edge of the crowd, and when he finally emerged from it in the direction of the Merceria they came forward to meet him with a natural and courteous salutation.

John's knowledge of Italian was not very advanced, and he spoke it better than he understood it; but the strangers succeeded in conveying to him a message of invitation from the Magnificent Signore Contarini, who was at the moment in the Doge's Palace close at hand, and would be glad to see him immediately, if it was not inconvenient to him.

It was, of course, inconvenient, but John did not feel equal to explaining this without seeming discourteous; he was not even able, though he made some efforts, to discover what Signore Contarini wanted with him, or how he could have sent

messengers to him so soon after his arrival in Venice. Possibly there was some mistake: but he had met and liked Contarini during his previous visit, and he ended by following his guides with reasonable cheerfulness.

They led him straight to the second floor of Calendario's building, which, as he already knew, contained the state-rooms set apart for the conduct of business by the highest officials of the Republic; but his memory of them was not very clear, and he passed through the hall of the Council of The Ten without recognising it. His guides knocked at a closed door on the far side of the hall; it was opened at once, and he found himself in a much smaller room whose name and use he had also forgotten. Its only occupant was an underling, who received an order from one of the two guides and disappeared without a word.

Up to this moment John had felt himself to be rather at a disadvantage, but in no real difficulty. After half an hour's waiting, and repeatedly failing to gain further information from his conductors, his mood changed and became first impatient and then suspicious. A quarter of an hour later he explained that he could wait no longer, and was informed by his two companions, with many apologies, that he would not be allowed to leave the room. The situation was no sooner made clear than his memory was suddenly illuminated: this was the Stanza dei Tre Capi del Consiglio,

the private room of The Three, the mysterious heads of the mysterious and omnipotent Council of The Ten.

The door opened, and three gentlemen entered. They wore long black robes over very rich costumes, and each of them bowed to John with severe dignity; they then took their seats at a broad table and motioned him to a place on the opposite side. At the ends of the table sat two secretaries; to right and left of John those who had been his conductors closed quietly in.

"Signore, we are much honoured by your ready response to our invitation, and if we have kept you waiting we pray your forgiveness."

The speaker was the eldest of The Three; he sat in the centre, face to face with John, and eyed him with so calm a gravity that his words sounded almost disdainful.

"Pardon me," replied John, "I was invited to meet a gentleman of the name of Contarini."

"A mistake possibly," said the Venetian. "In any case we are glad to see you. You have received letters from England."

"Private letters."

"Private?" replied his examiner; "are they not from the king's brother?"

"They are private letters."

"On public affairs."

"In any case," said John, controlling himself, "I do not see that your lordships are concerned,"

"The Republic is concerned with the affairs of all nations."

"Then the Republic," John retorted, "must use its own sources of information."

The Venetian was quite unmoved. "It will do so," he replied. "But one of your letters contained an enclosure."

John was startled: no one but Sir Thomas had seen him open the letter; yet this could be no random guess. For a single instant he thought of destroying the paper before it could be taken from him. Then he remembered that he had not yet read it himself; the message was evidently of importance, and it would take months to get it repeated from England. In desperation he tried what frankness would do. "There was an enclosure," he said, looking the Venetian in the face, "but I know nothing of its contents."

"That can be soon remedied."

"Not so easily!" replied John, laying his hand on his dagger.

No one moved. "Surely," said the Venetian, "you do not suspect us of such means?"

"Nothing else will do," retorted John, a little ashamed.

The Head of the Council smiled. "Then the Republic must again use its own sources of information." One of the secretaries handed John a paper.

"Be in no haste to leave Pavia; there is a

match there, if it could be drawn on, that would bring us more than a boy's first fancy. *Virtutum quærite lucem.*"

John was bewildered. He read the words with difficulty, and the suggestion contained in them was as strange to him as the clerkly Italian hand in which they were written.

"But how do I know this is genuine?" he asked.

The Venetian smiled again. "You might compare it with the original."

John's hand went mechanically to his pocket. The paper which it drew forth contained the same message, word for word, in the familiar hand of Lord Kent's secretary.

"It is Greek to me," he said with some vehemence—"Greek from beginning to end."

"The Republic can supply a translation," replied the Head of the Council, "if you will then tell us how you intend to act."

John was silent.

"Come," said the Venetian, who saw that he was really puzzled, "we will do our part first. We gather that the young Lord Thomas has formed an attachment in England; that his father, seeing obstacles to the marriage, has sent him abroad, perhaps to distract him, more probably to gain time, and now hopes that you may arrange a more advantageous alliance at the Court of Pavia. This, surely, is very easy Greek?"

John bowed, but remained obstinately silent.

"The Court of Pavia," continued the other, "has been, and will be again, at war with the Republic. For the moment we have a truce, but we should regret an alliance between that power and the King of England."

"The King of England!" cried John; "he is to marry Isabel of France."

"The present King of England is," replied the Venetian, "not his nephew."

John would have protested against this innuendo, but he remembered uncomfortably certain phrases of Lord Kent's and turned aside.

"You speak of the Visconti, but I see no reference to them. My lord suggests a match, but he does not say with whom."

The Venetian smiled once more. "*Virtutum quærite lucem*," he said, "that is not even Greek, it is plain Latin. Count de Vertus—Comes Virtutum—is the title of Gian Galeazzo, Lord of Milan and Pavia."

The whole tangle was now clear, and to his relief John saw the way out of it. He had but to disown intentions which he knew would be as repugnant to Tom's feelings as to his own.

"My lords," he said, "you make too much of this scrap of paper. It is only a suggestion, made without a thought of politics, and not to be communicated even to Sir Thomas himself. I am content to give you my word of honour, if you will allow

me to destroy these documents, that I will neither speak of them nor act upon them."

The Three looked at one another and a word or two passed between them.

"We accept your offer," said their chief, and made a sign to one of the secretaries. The man handed a crucifix to John. The Englishman's dignity was offended: he reddened and kept his eyes fixed on the gentlemen opposite.

The Head of the Council rebuked his secretary. "What is the use of that?" he asked severely, "the signore has passed his word: it was the brazier I called for."

The man hastened to bring a small brazier of charcoal, upon which John laid Lord Kent's message and the copy of it. As they shrivelled into ashes he saw once more the three Latin words, and remembered that only one of them had been explained to him. "*Quærite lucem*"—what was the "light" they were to seek? He could not ask, for he had abjured the quest: but curiosity remained.

The Three now rose, and conducted him with great courtesy to the head of the staircase. Two of them took leave of him there: the third accompanied him to the entrance of the Piazza, and made a cordial parting in public, which no doubt impressed the crowd of loiterers.

It certainly had its effect on John himself: he forgot that he had been spied upon and arbitrarily arrested, he forgot that he had been coerced, though

not against his inclination: he remembered only the courtesy, the power, and the intelligence of his examiners, and went home wondering why other kingdoms could not entrust themselves to a Council of Ten.

XXXI.

SIX weeks afterwards, on a fine evening near the end of April, John had his first sight of Pavia, a romantic cluster of pinnacles silhouetted against a clear sunset sky. It was worthy, he thought, of its title—the City of the Hundred Towers,—but ninety-nine of the towers counted for little in his imagination compared with the hundredth one, the newest of all, that which rose above the great red Castello of the Visconti.

Visconti! the name haunted him, clung to him, seemed to have become a permanent part of his thoughts. For a month past he had heard talk of little but Gian Galeazzo: enemies in Padua, friends in Mantua or Cremona—every one speculated on Gian Galeazzo's future and told innumerable legends of Gian Galeazzo's past. The story was a confused and inconsistent one, but it was clear enough to impress itself on John, and strange enough to fascinate him completely. Besides, he shared to the full our natural love of investigating the

smaller actions, possessions, and peculiarities of the great—a minute and genial inquisition which every one indulges in himself under the description of an interest in personality, even when he condemns it in others as a vulgar curiosity.

Whichever it was, Gian Galeazzo Visconti was the man to stir it irresistibly. He had been, from the first, so princely and so unlike all other princes. A quiet intellectual boy, little given to pleasures, much to reading and thinking; prudent—even wise—beyond his years; content, as he grew older, to sit out of sight, above the luxury and violence of his contemporaries, directing them to his own ends, and abstaining from their boisterous enjoyment of the means. His friends fought his battles, his generals won them: he himself in his impregnable Castello coolly incurred the reputation of a coward to secure the continuity of his far-reaching plans. His conquests were only less vast than his ambitions; yet war was but one among his activities. He founded the Duomo of Milan, the Palace and University of Pavia; patronised art and letters, and was a financier of the first rank. His enemies spoke of him as irreligious, and also as the slave of a superstitious passion for relics. He was a prey, too, they said, to nervous terrors: yet again one of his crimes was the bold and unscrupulous dash by which he had forestalled his uncle in the game of beggar-my-neighbour. Villain or philosopher or both, he was the most brilliant man in Italy, and

held himself and his family to be the equals of kings: his sister had matched with Lionel of England, and himself in early youth with a daughter of France. He was now re-married to his cousin Catarina, one of nine sisters whom their father Bernabo, the Scourge of Milan, had dowered with two million gold florins apiece and mated with sovereign princes from Austria to Cyprus. Decidedly this was a man to see, and John was now upon the point of seeing him.

The moment came even sooner than he had expected. Sir Thomas's visit had been arranged some time beforehand, and his Chamberlain had, as usual, preceded him by a day: the Duke was accordingly ready to receive him at once, and an invitation to supper was awaiting him on his arrival. It included all the officers of the household, and Sir Walter Manners understood that it would be a suitable occasion for full dress. There was no time to be lost, for the Duke's hour was eight o'clock, and punctuality was one of his strong points. When John reached his room he found his portmanteaus already open on the floor and a valet engaged in laying out his clothes. He remembered, as he dressed, that this evening would teach him, among other things, how to translate Lord Kent's Latin riddle: and he regretted that there would not be a soul in the Palace with whom he could share the pleasure of solving it.

XXXII.

WHEN John reached the large ante-room where the guests assembled before supper, Sir Thomas and Edmund had already been received by the Duchess, who was still standing with one of them on each side of her opposite to the door by which the later comers were entering. A little behind her, the Duke, a slender well-built man of forty, with a proud face and quick turn of the head like a hawk, was talking keenly to a group of gentlemen much less richly dressed than himself; by him, listening with bright eyes, was a girl of sixteen, evidently a younger sister of the Duchess, whom she resembled and completely outshone. Her complexion was like the smoothest ivory; she wore a wreath of brilliant stars in her dusky hair; and her long dress of delicate rose-coloured silk fell away from a stiff bodice latticed with gold thread and studded at every joint of the trellis with a single diamond.

"*Quærite lucem,*" said John to himself: but he could never be sure whether he said it before or after he heard the voice of the Chamberlain presenting him to her Most Serene and Magnificent Highness Donna Lucia Visconti. Either way, the riddle was answered beyond doubt; and as he saw his young lords both turning restlessly in her direction, he thought almost with pity of another lady at home

in England. Joan Stafford, for all her little air of command, was a gentle creature, bred up to expect obedience: this was a child with the profile of a conqueror, and if she had been bred in a hovel she would have ruled everything within reach. John was relieved to see that when the procession was formed it was Edmund who fell to her share.

The banquet of civilisation is generally a tiresome and disappointing ceremony, and probably has always been so; but there are pleasant exceptions, and Gian Galeazzo's hospitality was certainly exceptional. To begin with it was magnificent, even beyond the senatorial magnificence of Venice; but it had for an Englishman more unusual elements—a wider liberality, a continual slight novelty, a less impersonal courtesy. The high table was reserved, here as elsewhere, for the principal guests, but the principal guests were neither chosen nor arranged by the ordinary rules of precedence. Poets, painters, wits, and university professors sat mingled with noblemen, bankers, and generals; the select company included not only Sir Hugh Dolerd and Sir Walter Manners, as might have been expected from their knightly rank, not only the Master of the Horse and the four other chief officers, but Nicholas Love as representing the learning and William the Singer as exemplifying the musical talent of England. John, as Marshal in Hall, had been informed, rather than consulted, about these arrangements: they disconcerted him, but he was even more astounded to see

the Duchess and Sir Thomas placed in the centre of the table, while the Duke himself took an undistinguished seat lower down. Not far from him, but on the opposite side, Edmund was still more out of the general view, among the scholars whose company Donna Lucia evidently preferred. To the young Englishman beside her she showed an intermittent and patronising kindness.

The two hours which were spent at the table John found to have passed like a gallop with hounds; the poet on his right proved, to his surprise, more congenial company than the soldier on his left, but both were ready to talk, though they asked more questions than they answered. From time to time he ventured a glance towards the Duke, and more than once imagined that the great man's eyes had only just turned away from watching him.

At last the songs were over, and the Duke's public orator pronounced a neat but embarrassing eulogy on Sir Thomas, speaking of him as a royal and illustrious prince, and proposing his health as the favourite nephew of the King of England. Then, when the cheering had ceased and the Duchess had risen to withdraw with her ladies, the door of the banqueting-hall was thrown wide open to admit a procession of huntsmen dressed in green and white, who advanced by two and two, sounding their horns. The last four carried shoulder high an enormous platter of wood, covered with greenery, upon which

rested a couchant hart beautifully made in pastry of the purest white. The bearers placed it upon the high table, where it was admired by the whole company; then John saw the Duchess speaking to Sir Thomas, and pointing at the same time to the gold chain round the hart's neck, from the end of which hung a miniature dagger or hunting knife, with sheath and handle of gold set with emeralds.

Sir Thomas took the chain in his hands, but looked irresolute. He had of course seen many of these conceits, or dishes of fantasy, before; but the white hart couchant was King Richard's badge: he seemed not to have caught the exact bearing of the jest, or to know what was expected of him.

The Duchess spoke to him again, with a little laugh. This time he drew the knife and drove the point into the hart's neck, with the action of a venerer killing the real animal. A stream of red syrop gushed out from the wound; the spectators applauded and chattered, while one of the huntsmen broke up the hart and handed to Sir Thomas the sweetmeats with which it was filled, for distribution among those nearest to him. When this was done Tom appeared to his Master of the Horse to be rather at a loss: he stood there holding the gold chain in one hand and the knife in the other until the Duchess, with a sweep of her fan towards the group of ladies around her,

seemed to invite him to bestow on one of them the gift for which he himself had no further use.

He blushed, but replaced the dagger in its sheath, and without a moment's hesitation offered it to Donna Lucia. She accepted it with a cold but very stately curtsey, and handed it in her turn to Edmund, with an air of indifference so absolute as to seem almost childish. There was another outburst of applause and laughter, and the ladies swept out. As the gentlemen rearranged themselves and sat down again to their wine John looked about him in some bewilderment. But none of his friends were within reach, and before he could move the Duke himself bore down upon him. He introduced to John a young nobleman of his own age, and flitted lightly away along the hall, speaking to every group in turn, and sitting a short a time with each that at the end of ten minutes no one knew exactly where he was.

XXXIII.

JOHN'S new acquaintance was a lively youth, who made the conversation rattle. He was an inmate of the palace and evidently at his ease in the house, sufficiently so to offer John a stroll outside the banqueting-hall, which had by this time become

very hot and airless. They passed out through the ante-room and down into the courtyard, crossed this and reascended by a smaller staircase. They were now in an open loggia, where the dim cloudy sky was just visible through round-headed arches. As they approached the end of it John perceived by the noises which came faintly to them that they were not far from the festivity they had just left. His companion confirmed his impression, pointing to a small door in the wall along which they were passing. "A private passage," he explained; "you can return by it at any time when you think Sir Thomas may be needing you."

He turned away again to the front of the loggia, and the two leaned against the parapet under one of the cool dark arches. The Italian's lively manner fell to a quieter and more serious strain: he spoke earnestly of the Duke's wonderful achievements and of his great scheme for a united dominion of Northern Italy, devoted to peace and the liberal arts.

John was sympathetic, but inclined to sleepiness; the conversation sank lower and lower, into monotone, and finally to silence: his eyes closed, and for some time he was barely awake.

"You liked Venice?"

"Beautiful," murmured John.

"The Doge's Palace?"

"Very fine, . . . very fine."

There was again a silence, in which John's

thoughts floated him smoothly back to the *Stanza dei Tre Capi*: yes, he knew all about the Doge's Palace.

"I suppose you saw The Three," said the low soothing voice beside him.

"Oh yes, I saw The Three."

He saw them once more in the dreamy pause which followed. The soft voice went with his thought, like a familiar companion, a shadow of himself, almost unnoticed, quite unconsciously accepted.

"They questioned you? of course they would wish to question you: they would be anxious to forestall any alliance of England with Pavia."

This, too, John remembered, and also his own feelings on the point, and his agreement with The Three. He was not to speak of it. He remembered that. He did not speak.

"Their anxiety was easy to allay: you had no ambitions of the kind for Sir Thomas; you could give them your word on it."

John was silent: he knew he must not speak. He began to be a little less sleepy.

"You might even promise them," continued the voice, "that you would never mention the subject or pursue it."

"Quite so," thought John: and the effort not to say it roused him completely.

"The Three would believe you, but they would not trust you. They would have you watched until you left Pavia."

John was startled for a moment. "But how could they?" he asked; "for them Pavia is an enemy's country."

"They would employ a servant of your own: have you no Italians with you?"

"Only one, and he is not from Venice."

"Where did you get him, and why?"

"I engaged him at Padua, to buy for us. We are taking a lot of furs and jewellery home for presents, and we could not do the bargaining ourselves. Jacopo is doing it for us."

"Do princes buy?" said the Italian, with a peculiar intonation of quiet scorn which John had not heard in his voice before. "The Duke will give you more than you can carry: Jacopo is superfluous, and Jacopo is a spy."

"Would you dismiss him?" asked John doubtfully.

"'Dismiss' is a good word," replied the other, laughing gently. "Yes, I should always dismiss an enemy."

"In England," said John, "we think more than that of a man's life."

"In Italy," the quiet scornful voice answered, "we think more still of a man's life-work. What is a pawn here and there in the game of kings?"

The Englishman had no reply: he felt uncomfortable.

"After all," he said at last, "the man can do us no harm: there will be nothing for him to report."

"He is reporting at this moment."

"Reporting what?"

"No need for alarm," replied the quiet voice, "if he dies before the gates are opened. But he is reporting that your young lords are both in love with Donna Lucia."

"Then he is blundering: Sir Thomas is set upon an English marriage, and his brother is no alliance for the Duke. He is a younger son."

"Older or younger," said the voice, "an Earl's son is no match for a Visconti. But it is hardly an Earl's coat that these boys wear: there are possibilities in it."

John saw before his mind's eye the many shields which Kent Herald had punctiliously set up in every house where they had stayed—the lions of England, differenced with the narrowest possible bordure of argent. They had left a perfect trail of royal armory all along their route. But that meant nothing.

"You are mistaken," he said, "the relationship is on the mother's side only: they are not in the line of succession."

"Possibly," replied the other, "but that would hardly interest the Duke; he will be content to wait and see."

"See what?" asked John, almost indignantly.

"See who will distribute the sweets when the White Hart is broken up."

John remembered suddenly that look of embarrass-

ment on Sir Thomas's face; and then, that it was a long time since he had left the hall.

"I must go back now, I think," he said.

His companion raised himself from the parapet on which he had been leaning. "This way:" and he stepped towards the private door.

John was surprised that he went before his guest, surprised too that he seemed to be taller than when they walked together before. Through the half-lit passage he followed him with a nightmare feeling of strangeness: it came back to him that his companion of an hour ago had seemed a gay and harmless youth,—he longed to see his face again and know where he had been so mistaken.

The door of the banqueting-room opened and the figure in front stepped quietly into the noise and light—then turned and faced him with the Duke's eyes.

"I am glad to have talked with you," he said, as if to end the audience.

"My lord," cried John hastily, "my lord, you will leave me Jacopo?"

"Too late," replied the Duke with perfect good-humour, "he has been dismissed already."

XXXIV.

JACOPO'S disappearance was naturally the subject of many conjectures among the Englishmen, and John, who alone knew the truth, had a good deal to bear during the next few days. He began by feeling the man's death to press almost upon his own conscience; and he would have confided his trouble to Nicholas, but that he feared the revival of a discussion in which he had never come off very happily. Then as time ran on he became more and more reluctant to betray the Duke, whom his thoughts were learning to justify to an extent which he dared not have confessed in words. Gian Galeazzo fascinated him: not by the royal hospitality with which he entertained the travellers, or the incredible richness of the presents with which he loaded them, not even by his keen intellect and personal charm; but by the example which he gave of a brilliant success in personal government. If John had envied the Venetians their Council, how much more must he admire a ruler who had all the secret and unlimited powers of The Ten, and added to them the magic of kingship and the driving force of a single dominant will. In his absolute sovereignty as in the splendour and refinement of his tastes, the Duke of Milan was exactly what John and his friends wished their ideal King

of England to be. The ideal, of course, required some sacrifices; but John began to believe that even strict justice and the lives of men are sometimes a small price to pay for the success of a system or an idea. On the other side of the account it must be entered to his credit that he continued to detest cruelty even while he condoned it, and that he would have given his own life more cheerfully than another's, in any case where the ideal demanded that a life should be given.

This was an inconsistency which his new Italian friends were not slow to point out, in the brisk disputations which kept the ducal palace so much alive. Not only John himself, but Sir Thomas, and, above all, Edmund, were regarded by them as devotees of an old-fashioned chivalry, based on obsolete scruples and unworthy, in spite of its romantic charm, to guide reasonable men in a scientific age. The three young Englishmen argued stoutly, and laughed away what they could not answer: but they all thought it rather hard that they should be smitten on both cheeks,—for Nicholas continued to lash them for hard-heartedness while the Pavians buffeted them for the weakness of their conscience. They found support in one quarter only, and that an unexpected one. Lucia, with all the haughtiness of the Visconti, had more imagination than most of them, and a warmth of feeling which was shared perhaps by none. After two days of almost contemptuous indifference, she had revised her judg-

ment: for she found in these shy, naïve young Englishmen more of the spirit which fed her own high reveries than she had ever met with in any of her Italian admirers. From the moment when she saw through the veil of strange manners and embarrassed speech that they belonged to her own order, the Order of the Chivalrous Heart, which has never known of any difference but one between men, she insisted with the childlike wilfulness of her character that they should be her constant companions so long as their stay lasted. Fortunately, in the two days before this change of attitude took place, Tom had had time to remember a dearer allegiance, and Edmund to digest a hint from John on the latitude allowed to younger sons. So neither of them entirely lost his head, though both drank pretty deeply of the sweet wine that was poured out for them. As for Gian Galeazzo, he treated them both with perfect confidence, watched them with unperturbed interest, and smiled in John's face whenever he found himself observed.

Their first expedition outside the walls of Pavia was to the great monastery which the Duke had recently founded. It was planned, like other Carthusian houses, in imitation of the Grande Chartreuse; but Gian Galeazzo intended it to eclipse all previous foundations of its kind, and he was devoting the most minute and careful attention to every detail of the work. The architect's plans were for the time his favourite subject of conversation, and

it was particularly agreeable to him that Sir Thomas had in his train a monk of the Charterhouse, whom he could question as to the arrangements of the seven monasteries of that Order already existing in England. He made Nicholas ride by his side, and in his eagerness drew continually farther and farther ahead of his other companions: the Duchess followed with Sir Thomas, Lucia with Edmund, John next with Trivulzio, the young nobleman who had helped to mystify him on the first evening, and a company of guards and servants brought up the rear.

It was a May morning, but the weather was still as cheerless and gusty as it had been during the greater part of April. John was struck, when the cavalcade passed the Porta da Milano and came out into the rain-sodden country, with the immense desolation of the view. They were travelling along a raised causeway between two chill and dreary canals: on each side extended a monotonous landscape of marshy pasture and green rice-fields gleaming coldly here and there with standing water; in front the road ran straight to the horizon without a bend or feature of any kind to relieve its weariness.

Only once in this solitude did they come upon any sign of human activity: a single group of peasants with a mule-cart stood drawn up on one side of the causeway to give them passage. They saluted the party with every appearance of goodwill, and readily told Trivulzio, when he questioned

them on John's behalf, their business and their place of abode, a village to the north, in Milanese territory.

"They seem loyal enough," John remarked as they parted. "I suppose they knew that it was the Duke?"

"They have good reason," replied his companion; "they are old enough to remember a very different lord of Milan." He lowered his voice and pointed to Donna Lucia to explain his caution. "It was her father, you know, whom the Duke deposed; and not one finger raised by man, woman, or child in all Milan to save their beloved master! You have heard what they used to call him?"

"The Scourge?" said John. "I know; but I thought I had also heard that his successor was severe."

"Why not? He loves to keep discipline, but he is not capricious; no burying men alive or hunting them with dogs. He plays to win, of course; but we say without flattery that he is death to his enemies and life to his own people. What else should a ruler be?"

"I agree," John replied. "You are fortunate—very fortunate."

Trivulzio caught the tone of regret and hastened, as the very fortunate will, to concede a fraction by way of discount. "I don't mean to say," he continued, "that I consider any man perfect."

"Oh?" said John, pricking a ready ear. "Where is the dint in so fine a blade?"

But as he spoke the riders in front wheeled sharply to the right: the cavalcade entered a lane deep in mud and broken by the passage of heavy waggons, where it was necessary to move warily and in single file. At the end of it, behind a confused wilderness of felled tree trunks, wooden sheds, and blocks of uncut stone, rose a gigantic hive of scaffolding peopled by a swarm of workmen, noisy and cheerful, among whom moved here and there a superintendent in the white habit of the Carthusians.

The hour which followed was spent in the curiosity, disappointments, and discomfort which are the common experience of visitors to uncompleted buildings. In its present early stage the Certosa was for the most part merely a reproduction in relief of the ground-plan which the Duke carried in his hand; the walls of the church and conventual buildings were but just beginning to rise above the foundations, and the only part of the whole mass which bore any resemblance to its destined condition was the square cloister surrounded by twenty-four separate little cells or cottages for the fathers of the monastery. Some of these were already inhabited by monks whose knowledge of building made them useful superintendents; they had a temporary chapel of wood, and made shift to bear hopefully their present discomfort, for, as the Duke explained to his guests, the regular life of the Carthusian is one

designed above all others to combine the dignity of a gentleman with the assiduous piety of a religious. "He lives," said Gian Galeazzo, "when duty does not take him elsewhere"—here he bowed to Nicholas—"in a house of his own, complete with oratory, parlour, workroom, and storeroom; he has a garden to himself, his meals are brought to his door by a lay brother, and he is entirely free from all menial occupation. Yes, it is a life for a gentleman—too good for a duke." He turned again to Nicholas. "What was your recreation?" he asked. "Were you a gardener or a craftsman?"

The monk was slow in replying. John glanced at him in surprise, and saw that he was deeply moved. His massive temples were dyed with a deep flush that John knew well, and his eyes glistened. "My lord," he said at last, "I had hoped to write—to translate at least—we have so few books in English."

The Duke assented with marked courtesy. "You are right," he said; "I recommend to you the works of St Bonaventura: perhaps you will accept a volume or two from my library."

Tom joined with Nicholas in thanks for this offer: he knew nothing of St Bonaventura, but he knew the value of such a gift, and he was the one of all the party whom the Duke had succeeded in really interesting in his new foundation. He alone had power, like Gian Galeazzo, to make such plans and carry them out, and he shared that play-

fellow's sympathy which to this day makes itself felt whenever two wealthy men discuss the water-supply or lighting apparatus of their country houses. The time might very well come when he would wish to build a monastery himself, and if so, it would certainly be a Carthusian one. Yes, for the moment at least, he was quite as much interested as Nicholas.

Edmund, meanwhile, was talking with the two ladies. John saw his opportunity, and drew Trivulzio a little aside.

"You were interrupted—on the way here."

"No need to finish now," replied the young Italian, pointing to the Duke, whose head was still bowed over his plans; "you can see for yourself."

"Every man must be allowed his hobby," said John, smiling at his friend's scornful tone.

"Not when it is against public policy."

"I am rather anti-clerical myself," said John; "but the Carthusians——"

"Oh! it's not one rather than another," Trivulzio interrupted; "it is the whole thing."

"The Church?"

"Well—Christianity: the whole worn-out suit of clothes, the rags we are made to hang out on high days and holy days, as if they were really our habitual wear."

John was a little staggered. An interest in Lollards had been hitherto his farthest venture

into unorthodox territory. "What would you have the Duke do with Christianity?" he asked.

"Abolish it."

"By ducal decree, I suppose," said John; "but why?"

"Because it is impracticable, and wastes our time and force; because it is the support of the weak, and the welfare of mankind depends on the increase of the strong; because it is an unreal view of the world, and keeps us from finding a truer one."

"Well, we needn't discuss all that," replied John; "the point is that the Duke evidently holds a different opinion."

"Not he," said Trivulzio,—“he, least of all men.”

"But he founds a monastery."

"Yes, and goes to service after service, and prays to saint upon saint—that is just what I complain of: his actions fall so far short of his beliefs."

John laughed outright. "Very like the rest of us," he said, "but upside down. I should like to hear his own comment on that."

"You shall," replied Trivulzio, somewhat nettled; "he is coming towards us now."

The Duke and Nicholas had rolled up their plan, and were moving slowly down the cloister, followed closely by the rest of the party. As they drew near to the corner where the two young men were standing, John glanced at his companion, and judged from his sullen look that he meant mis-

chief. He determined to forestall him, and stepping a pace forward to meet the Duke, boldly flung himself and his antagonist into deep water together.

"My lord, will you judge our quarrel? One of us asserts that Christianity is an impossible and undesirable ideal, and that it is time we gave up the public profession of a life which we do not really follow. The other maintains——"

He stopped, and looked at Nicholas in some embarrassment.

The shadow of a smile appeared and faded on Gian Galeazzo's face.

"Yes?" he asked, glancing from John to the Carthusian. "What does the other maintain?"

"If he is John Marland," said Nicholas in his most innocent tone, "he maintains and believes that the life of man is only possible or tolerable in proportion as it resembles the Christian life."

"And what does Sir Thomas say?" asked the Duke, turning to his guest.

"I agree to that," replied Tom in his quick short way. "I have never thought there was any question about it."

Lucia smiled faintly in her turn. She looked at Edmund, but Trivulzio was eager to speak in his own behalf.

"I accept what my Lord Thomas has said: there never is any question about this—until one begins to think, and then there is no longer any question about it."

Tom flushed a little, but was silent: he was not quite sure of Trivulzio's intention or of his rank.

The young Italian was quick enough to take warning. He went on in a more serious tone: "Surely to look frankly at the world is to see that it is not ordered, and never has been ordered, by the Christian rule. We do not, for instance, love our enemies or meet force with meekness. We could not: to do so would mean the triumph of brute stupidity instead of the dominion of the best."

Tom felt himself on firm ground again: he had clear ideas on government.

"I am all for the dominion of the best," he said; "but you are confusing two different cases—two opposite duties. Certainly we do often resist evil and kill our enemies; but we do it only as we are commanded by the Christian law, in defence of the rights of others. We who govern have received a *fidei commissum*,—we are trustees for the commonweal."

Trivulzio bowed. "Your lordship, if I may say so, has been well educated for the part; but by whom were you appointed a trustee? By yourself, or your family? Reason and Science forbid any other answer. And in your country, I am told, there are two parties in the State, both of which claim to be trustees for the commonweal. Which of them is not, in its own opinion, resisting the evil in accordance with the Christian law? How do you decide between them?"

Tom hesitated; and Nicholas answered for him.

"We judge each party by the acts and character of its members."

Tom's face cleared; but the irony which escaped him was not lost on his antagonist.

"Good!" cried Trivulzio; "the pot calls the kettle black, and you fight it out like men. Your 'law' has nothing to do with it after all: the stronger wins, and, as I have had the honour of telling you, Christianity fails by every test."

John felt a fierce desire to fling his glove in Trivulzio's face, but a better equipped champion took the chance from him.

"N-n-not a bit!" cried Edmund, his eagerness bringing back his boyish stammer. "You go too fast, b-both of you. I don't agree with anything you have said. It all depends on what you want. You want life, and so do I, and so does every one; but you think death is the opposite of life, and spoils it; and I think you're wrong. I think life is not just living, but giving. And I don't know whether the Christian life is practical, or only ideal and impossible, but I'm sure it's the one heroic thing in the world; and I don't care where it takes me or how soon it ends, so long as I have it. And where can you find any failure in that?"

It was the longest speech he had ever made, and it left him breathless, with bright eyes and the blood well up in his cheeks. There was a moment's

tense silence: then Lucia moved towards Edmund with the poised irresistible sweep of a sea-bird and laid her hands upon his shoulders. He sank on one knee before her, and she, with a gesture half-queenly, half-childlike, stooped and kissed him on the forehead.

"You are my knight," she said, with perfect indifference to the whole world about her; "and if I cannot have you, you may be sure I will have no other."

The Duchess glanced nervously at her husband, but Gian Galeazzo was as imperturbable as ever.

"The Lord Edmund has it," he said in a tone of cool decision, "and I continue my building. Let us go home now to dinner."

XXXV.

JOHN was decidedly startled by the little scene in the cloisters of the Certosa. If any one was to be attracted by the Light of Pavia, he had vaguely hoped it might be Edmund rather than his brother; but now that the candle had moved so suddenly and effectually towards the moth, he remembered with dismay that he himself might have to answer for the result to two great lords. His own master, Lord Kent, would of course stand to gain by it, but he

would not gain what he wanted—an escape from the Stafford entanglement. The Duke—well, the Duke had spoken pretty plainly on that first evening; it was not likely that he would allow anything to tie his hands before the true moment of decision should be reached. He would be no more bound to Edmund than he considered himself bound to Frederick of Thuringia, a suitor whom he had handled so adroitly that the poor Margrave could neither carry off Lucia and her dowry once for all, nor set himself free to seek a fortune elsewhere. John feared the ducal wrath.

He need not have perturbed himself. Gian Galeazzo, having once determined that this part of the game must wait until other pieces should have moved, looked with great coolness on the escapades of a boy and girl: they were only expressing their feelings, and he had never yet failed to overrule feelings by policy when the time came. But for all his detachment, he was not careless: the ceremonies, gaieties, and athletic exercises of a brilliant court were multiplied so incessantly that the young Englishmen were distracted to the verge of deadness, and even Lucia's imperious simplicity found but few opportunities in a life that was lived perpetually among a thousand pair of eyes—the keenest in Europe. Finally, when the whirl was at its height the Duke carried off his guests to Milan, where the building of the Duomo and the festivities of another noble society engaged them afresh. They

returned to Pavia in mid-June, to find that the ladies had already gone north for the summer months. Lucia had left a ring to be given secretly to Edmund; it fell, of course, into the Duke's hands, and remained there for some days. When he presented it to the young gentleman at a farewell interview, he openly named the giver, but at the same time handed to Sir Thomas a precisely similar jewel from himself. For Edmund the significance of the gift remained; for other eyes, then and afterwards, it was entirely confused.

At the end of June the Englishmen took the road again, heavily laden with the outpourings of Gian Galeazzo's munificence. Their journey was by no means over, but the tide of its excitement had now passed the full, and every week seemed longer than the last. August they spent in the hills with the Marchese di Saluzzo, a friend and distant kinsman of the Hollands. Their host, a chivalrous and cultivated gentleman, had been present at the jousting at St Inglebert, and had introduced a description of it into his poem, "*Le Chevalier Errant*," which was recited more than once to the company by the Marchese's French minstrel. It gave rise to many pleasant talks and reminiscences, but led in the end to a difference which strained the patience of both author and audience. The Marchese believed, and recorded, that King Richard himself had been present at St Inglebert, but that he had been cast completely into the shade by the brilliant success

of his cousin Henry of Derby. The Englishmen protested in vain that Richard, to their certain knowledge, had never been in France since his accession, and that Derby, who took part only in the later and less strenuous jousting, when the French champions had long established their superiority, could not be said to have distinguished himself at all. They felt hotly about it, for it was their own party which had borne the brunt of the contest, John himself among them, and they had come to look upon Derby with a certain hostility, partly jealous and partly caught from their elders. This feeling was now intensified by the mere accident of a mistake in a poem; they ended by forgiving the Marchese and scoring their annoyance up against the man he praised.

September they spent in France—partly in Paris, partly in Picardy with the Count of St Pol, who had married Lord Kent's sister, Maud, and was enthusiastically devoted to England and the king, his brother-in-law. He kept the travellers until the middle of October, and then accompanied them to Calais, where Richard's long-projected marriage with Isabel of France was by this time in the final stage of preparation. The ceremony took place on the 26th of October: a day of triumph for the king's party, for not only was the truce between the two countries formally prolonged for thirty years, but the French king bound himself irrevocably to Richard's interest when he placed in his hands so dear a

hostage as his seven-year-old daughter. "Take her," he said with a touching forgetfulness of his royal dignity; "she is the creature I love most of all things in this world, except my son and my queen." Richard and his friends accepted the trust with real enthusiasm; the pretty childishness of the little queen appealed to them not less than her position as the sign and symbol of so great an alliance.

On the 13th of November they brought her home to London, where the splendour of her reception was only marred by the growling of Gloucester—louder than ever, because more impotent.

Towards evening the two factions became more and more violent; the noise of jeering and even of blows came to John's ears as he sat in the hall of the New June, paying off the subordinate members of his young lord's *curia*.

"We've been away a year, William," he said to the singer, "but things don't seem to have changed much at home."

William looked tragically gloomy. "No," he replied, "the water shows no change till the dyke bursts."

"Why should it burst? Richard will rule now if he has never ruled before. I happen to know that he had long consultations with the French king."

"He had better have talked with the chancellor," said William.

John's curiosity was pricked. "Dormans?" he

asked. "What could Dormans tell him of government?"

"Nothing," replied the singer. "To deaf ears all are dumb: but there was an echo in the air yonder—'though they deny it a hundred times, kings rule by the suffrage of their people.'"

John's head went up. "That is why they so often do it ill," he retorted, and then with a sudden rush of anger, "You may believe me, my friend, when I tell you that the time has gone by for grumblers—we shall make shorter men of them presently."

Outside the uproar increased. An hour later there was close fighting up and down the city. Gloucester's partisans were cut off and driven south across the river: they got away with little serious injury, but in the jam on London Bridge the poor old Prior of Tiptree fell and was trampled to death.

PART IV.

S U N R I S E

XXXVI.

IN April 1397 the Earl of Kent lay dying. He was fully aware of his condition, and made no attempt to conceal it from others, but not even the faintest shadow of change was allowed to pass over his behaviour or his view of the world. To those who knew him less intimately he appeared to be an edifying example of constancy: but John, with whom, as his son's most confidential adviser, he had several consultations during these last weeks, was often amazed and sometimes scandalised at his pertinacity. It seemed unnatural to him, though Nicholas assured him that it was the most natural thing in the world, for a man who had all his life walked in the ways of craft and acquisitiveness to go on by the same path to the very edge of death itself. Certainly this man never faltered or turned aside for a moment, and John remembered his last interview with him as the strangest of all.

By Lord Kent's own request he had come to Friday Street on the morning of St George's Day: Sir Thomas had gone to Windsor with his uncle, much against his inclination, but his father had declared that there was no risk in his absenting himself for

this one day, and had added that he wished to have an hour's talk with him on the following morning.

He was still in this confident mood when John arrived, and he insisted on being left entirely alone with his visitor: even Father Gilbert, his chaplain and confessor, must quit the room with the rest. "My good father," he said in reply to an expression of reluctance, "I paid the Pope a pretty penny that you might give me plenary absolution at the most useful moment: I am not going to throw my money away—be sure you will be called when the moment comes."

He made John sit close by his bedside, and began at once to speak to him in a quiet slow voice, that sounded almost inhumanly matter-of-fact.

"It is a very awkward time for me to die," he said; "the king has laid his game well, but someone ought to be there to see that he plays it out; and then there's our own share—we shall not get much that is worth having unless we keep our heads. Tom is young—he will be too tender: and my brother is always too violent—he may make himself too unpopular for promotion. As I cannot be here myself, I must leave my instructions with one or two of the best of you, and trust that you may be able to carry them out."

John ventured to hope, quite sincerely, that they might yet have the advantage of Lord Kent's advice at the critical moment.

The dying man ignored the remark as completely as though he had not heard it.

"I select you," he continued, "because you are fairly capable, and have no personal interest in the matter: nothing to gain, I mean, one way or the other. I have taken care that you shall have nothing to gain: the king has promised me that you shall receive neither land, money, nor knight-hood for at least two years from now, whatever happens; so as this business will certainly be on within two months, you will have no ambitions to make your hand unsteady."

John flushed. He did not know whether to feel more flattered or insulted at this candid treatment. But the old lord paid no kind of attention to his feelings.

"Let us take the king first," he went on; "we Hollands stand or fall with the king—like mistletoe, with no roots of its own, as some fellow said once. Huntingdon had him disciplined for it, but it is true. Well—I think Richard looks fairly safe this time: he has peace everywhere abroad, France is bound to him firmly, and at home things have changed very much for the better. No one likes Gloucester now; his grumbling is stale, and has no substance in it. Lancaster has come over completely since his Beaufort brats were put on the warm side of the blanket. Derby is a fox, but he will never risk himself to save another, and when you have done with Gloucester you can put the dogs on to him.

"Now, remember, John Marland, there must be no weakness about this,—no weakness of either kind, no meroy and no blind rage. Gloucester dies, of course, but Arundel must die too. You must all see to that. It is unfortunate that he is my son's uncle, because remarks will be made, but the fact is irrelevant and you must none of you flinch. On the other hand, to go to extremes with Warwick would be mere self-indulgence: he is a hateful creature but a weak one, and what we need is not his blood but his broad acres. His stud, too, is worth looking after—remind Sir Thomas when the time comes. Warwick must fall to his share, because it will look better for Arundel to go to Huntingdon, who is no relation. Gloucester will cut up among the rest—Scrope and Nottingham and Despenser."

He lay back upon his pillows and closed his eyes, partly no doubt from weakness and fatigue, but partly too, it seemed, in tranquil enjoyment of the conquests he was planning: there was an expression of mild thankfulness about his mouth with its drooping yellow-grey moustache, and it was even more marked when he lifted his withered leaden-coloured lids again and looked placidly at John.

"If you get through this affair well," he said, "you will see your way more clearly to the next. Lancaster, I understand, holds more than one-fourth of England: no one would raise a finger for the Beauforts, so when once old John is gone you have

only young Henry of Derby to settle with. Remember that I am against your moving while Lancaster is alive: if you do, you must use a stalking-horse—Nottingham or Salisbury—but it would be far better to wait. In the meantime keep Richard up to the mark about titles: Sir Thomas and Huntingdon must both be dukes if they are to be suitable candidates for any good portion of Lancaster's holding."

John was as capable as any one else of distinguishing right and wrong. He knew that the plans to which he had been listening were a subtly woven tissue of cunning, greed, and callousness, but he was not conscious of any feeling of repulsion; on the contrary, he was tempted to smile at what he heard. This quiet, shrunken, decrepit old man, so near the end of all his powers, was plotting the removal of great landmarks and the foundation of splendid fortunes as coolly as a sick child might plot the rearrangement of his father's garden. Historic dynasties were to be uprooted here and new ones planted there without sanction and without difficulty. There was an air of unreality over the whole thing, and the contrast between these gigantic crimes and the feebleness of their proposer was decidedly humorous. Nevertheless John concealed his smiles.

"The Imperial Crown," continued Lord Kent in a musing tone, "I hardly know what to say about that. The Germans are plainly tired of that

drunken sot Wenceslas, but their offer was not a firm one. It was I who got Richard to send the Commission of Inquiry. You understand that it does not matter which way they report. If favourably, the king gains enough popularity to strike at once; if, on the other hand, they find there is little or no chance for him, they are to say that the electors consider his position too insecure while certain malcontents are at large. That gives him a pretext against Gloucester: the Commissioners will be back in a few weeks now, so you must be getting ready. Now let me hear you repeat my instructions."

At that John's brain reeled: never had any blow so stunned him. The humour, the unreality, the scenic remoteness had all disappeared in a flash; he had been pushed at one stride upon the stage,—as he thought it,—and found the play after all deadly earnest and the daggers sharp. He was silent—the power of speech seemed to have deserted him,—but the mere effort to put this villany into words of his own had suddenly shown him the truth. He had looked into the cup that he was ordered to hand on, and he saw that the draught was more than half of it rank poison.

"Have I made myself understood?" asked the quiet, tired voice.

"Perfectly," replied John—"perfectly."

"Then let me hear you repeat my instructions."

There was no escape. "You wish," stammered

John desperately,—“you wish the king to impeach the Duke of Gloucester and the Earl of Arundel: you wish . . .” and he went miserably through the whole scheme, seeking refuge at every step behind the phrase which seemed to divide his superior’s responsibility from his own. At last it was over, and he had time to comfort himself by the reflection that nothing could induce him to keep the plot alive a moment after its author’s death.

“Now,” said Lord Kent with satisfaction, “I have explained things to my brother Huntingdon and to you: you show the more intelligence, he has the more goodwill. There remains only Swynnerton; he should be here by this time. Be good enough to send him to me directly he arrives.”

Swynnerton! John heard the name with the despairing rage of the drowning man who feels that he can no longer bear up against the stream.

XXXVII.

THAT night John and Swynnerton met for a handshake only, but they sat together for an hour next morning in the hall of the great house in Friday Street, while Sir Thomas and Edmund were taking their turns in their father’s room upstairs, and

John found that, in spite of painful associations, there was a good deal of pleasure in renewing what had once been so intimate an acquaintance. Swynnerton certainly was not the old Roger of the days of St Inglebert, but still less did he appear to be the ruffian John had at one time thought him. He was still short of speech and decided in manner; but he had acquired the urbanity of the man of substance, and his peculiarities were now rounded into a general impression of character and good sense. He spoke gravely and dispassionately of Gloucester's position, and John felt reassured. Then the old warmth began to rekindle as he remembered that Roger had left a wife and a very comfortable home to take his share of the risks they were about to face, and heard that he, too, by Lord Kent's arrangement, was to receive no immediate reward.

Lord Huntingdon passed through the hall while they were talking and went upstairs. Ten minutes afterwards Sir Thomas came down, glowing with an excitement which he controlled but could not conceal.

"Isn't my father a masterpiece?" he exclaimed in the sudden, eager manner which he had not yet left behind. "There he lies dying by inches, but he thinks of everything and everybody. He has given in about my marriage, and he has got my uncle round too: we have just shaken hands on it."

John offered no congratulations and Sir Thomas commented on the omission.

"I beg your pardon," John explained. "I was wondering what Lord Stafford would say."

"So am I," replied Tom. "My father says he gave him a hint some time last year; but he thinks it would be better if I opened the question afresh on my own account, without any mention of him."

"Quite so," said John, and fell to musing once more over the wide and intricate web of guile, in the midst of which this old spider lay waiting helplessly for the last enemy to destroy him in his turn. Clearly he had foreseen that the question of this marriage would inevitably be raised once more as soon as Tom had succeeded to his earldom, and might prove fatal to his combinations by dividing nephew from uncle: he had therefore won over Huntingdon to withdraw his objections at this last solemn interview. John had no reason to disapprove of the move, but it reminded him unpleasantly of the greedy and cold-blooded purposes for which the whole web had been woven, and his face clouded perceptibly.

"What is there to look so black about?" asked Sir Thomas.

"Nothing; I was only thinking."

"Thinking in thunder," said Sir Thomas,—*"rattle it out, man."*

Why not? John took a sudden resolution. "The truth is," he said, "I was wondering how far my

lord has laid his plans before you, and how far he has left it to us to do—afterwards.”

Sir Thomas nodded gravely at the last word. “I think he has told me everything,” he replied, “but of course we shall talk it all over.” His face brightened. “He says we have only a few weeks to wait now. There are archers on the way already—two thousand of them, from Cheshire: the best shots in England, and every man as tough as his own bowstring.”

John still looked gloomy.

“Come, John,” said his young lord, “I don’t understand you. You and I have been hoping for a war these five years, and now you look glum when it comes.”

“Not I,” replied John; “I’ll take the fighting thankfully: but what comes afterwards?”

“I have no idea,” said Tom cheerfully, “and upon my word I don’t care.”

“What?” cried John incredulously, “you don’t care? What do you look to gain, then?”

“To lose, you mean,” replied Tom, laughing. “We hope to lose the sound of Gloucester’s scolding. By the way,” he added, “I’ve not heard where we are to send the fellow when we’ve caught him.”

John made no reply: Swynnerton stretched his right hand open and brought it down edgeways upon the palm of his left with a sharp sound.

Tom stopped laughing and turned to John.

"Seriously," he said, "what does it all matter to us? We have a good cause and a good fight: we win gloriously, and the king reigns as a king should reign. He has never had a fair chance yet." He spoke with a touch of boyish enthusiasm that warmed John's heart.

"Right!" he replied more brightly, "only I heard of other motives—upstairs."

"Ah!" cried Tom, "don't spoil it all with motives. A sick man has his fancies—shut up indoors day after day, it is not to be wondered at—but we needn't take much account of them."

Lord Huntingdon here passed through and called to Swynnerton, who rose and followed him out of the house. Sir Thomas nodded after them over his shoulder.

"There goes my uncle," he said, "with another set of motives: he offered me some, but I said 'Thank you, I would rather take the game as it comes.'" He rattled on for some time in the same vein, to John's unspeakable comfort: and then dismissed him for the night to the New June.

XXXVIII.

WHEN John returned on the following morning the change was already over, and Sir Thomas, now Earl of Kent, was sitting in his father's seat at the high table, transacting business with the officers of the household. The old lord had persevered until midnight in devising schemes for the aggrandisement of his family: he had then ordered his sword, his seal, and his keys to be handed in his presence to his elder son, and renounced all further interest in the affairs of this world. Father Gilbert received his confession, administered the last offices of the Church, and testified, when all was over, that he had never witnessed a more truly sanctified departure. He reappeared in the hall shortly after John's arrival, for the purpose of expressing publicly, and at the earliest possible moment, his earnest hope that the new lord would not forget his father's desire to be commemorated by a religious foundation.

The suggestion seemed to John, who was standing by, to be improperly timed and not altogether honestly made.

"My lord will also not forget," he broke in, "that this desire was not an absolute one, but expressly dependent on the success of certain ventures to be made at a future time."

"That is true," said the young lord, leaning back in his chair and looking from one to the other.

"And I had it clearly in mind, my lord," said the churchman; "but I remembered also that this noble house has always been zealous for the Faith, and that your lordship has from very early years exhibited a singular devotion towards religion."

John coloured with annoyance and made a contemptuous movement, but his master received the compliment with dignity. "It is very good of you to say so, Father Gilbert," he said, "and it is not for me to contradict you on such a matter. However," he continued, "I certainly had an idea, when I was in Italy, of building a Charterhouse—something on the plan of the Duke's at Pavia."

"A princely idea, if I may say so," replied the chaplain, bowing—and preparing to retire, as if his point had been conceded.

John glanced down with disgust at the smooth neck and obsequious shoulders beside him. "I take it, my lord," he said, "that nothing can be decided for a month or two yet." He looked significantly at Sir Thomas.

"No," replied his lord, "but I rather like the notion; we can be thinking about it, and I will speak to the king."

The chaplain departed with no sign of triumph, and John sat down at Sir Thomas's elbow. His irritation soon subsided, but he continued to feel a certain uncomfortable strangeness in the new order

of things. He had always thought of his master as a boy, and regretted the pliability of his character: it was disconcerting to find him so altered by a few hours of authority, and already inclined to act without his most confidential adviser, if not positively in opposition to his counsel. But he remembered that however conduct may be influenced by temporary causes, in the long-run character will always assert itself: it was one thing for a young man just set free, and at the same time raised above himself, by his father's death, to take his own way with servants and inferiors; it would be another matter to resist the steady pressure of an unscrupulous mentor like Huntingdon. But here again a surprise was in store for him.

"Now, John," said Sir Thomas when the last of the orders for the funeral had been given and they were left alone together, "I want you to help me—in one matter particularly. I am going to set about this marriage at once. My uncle has given his consent and promised to join in making up the quarrel, but I am perfectly aware that he does it against the grain. Still, the fact remains that just now he can't do without me,—at least he can't do without the Earl of Kent,—and I mean to have my own way while I am indispensable."

"You say 'at once,'" remarked John dubiously; "do you mean before——?"

"Yes, before the row begins; we have a month or more."

John reflected. "Suppose Stafford consents, would you propose to be married without waiting?"

The Earl of Kent relapsed into his younger manner for a moment. "I would be married to-morrow!" he said.

"And immediately afterwards you ride Gloucester down; what if the Staffords take the wrong view of that?"

"The Staffords! She would be a Holland by then."

John shook his head. "Women change their names but not their natures," he said.

"Some do," replied Tom—"these heiresses, who marry three times in five years and go the grey mare's pace all their lives; you are thinking of Savage and Swynnerton, perhaps; I am not Savage or Swynnerton, and I am not marrying a rich widow." He spoke scornfully: here, too, the change was making itself felt.

"Well," said John in a somewhat offended tone, "I have done my duty; my humble warning is that you run a double risk: if Gloucester wins, we lose; if Gloucester goes under, you may find you have offended both your uncle and your wife's brother. What then?"

Tom's face glowed with an inward light. "Then, my dear John," he said, laying his hand on the squire's arm, "then my wife will stand by me against them all—she has told me so."

"Oh, has she?" grumbled John. "Why didn't you say that sooner?"

Then he remembered how he had stood in this same room a year ago and talked of this marriage with the old lord. Tom, like his father, had kept back something till the end; but the contrast between the two warmed John's heart.

XXXIX.

TOM was thoroughly in love, and his eagerness rather increased than diminished in face of obstacles; but for the present the obstacles proved to be insuperable, or at any rate insuperable except by a disregard of convention and convenience which was beyond the power of an ordinary young man of twenty-one. His father's funeral and the settlement of his affairs kept him occupied from day to day without a chance of breaking off to ride north in pursuit of Lord Stafford. Early in May he despatched a messenger with letters to Lady Joan and to her brother; it was near the end of the month when the man returned with news that they had gone to Northumberland, and would not be in London until the middle of June. Hardly any time would be gained by going after them now, and in any case the storm was already blowing up so fast over the court that it would have been impossible for Lord Kent to absent himself from the council table.

When at last they returned, and Lord Stafford, to John's surprise, showed himself not unwilling to consider the match as a possible one, it was close upon July, and, as the king said to his nephew when he approached him upon the subject, no weather for weddings. A week afterwards the thunder-cloud burst.

On Thursday, the 5th of July, the king gave a banquet at Westminster, for which unusually long and elaborate preparations had been made. Among the specially invited guests were Richard's uncles, the Dukes of Lancaster, York, and Gloucester, and the Earls of Arundel and Warwick. Gloucester and Arundel were away from London, and, whether by agreement or coincidence, both excused themselves on the ground of ill-health. Warwick had not the nerve for so dangerous a step; he therefore took the still more dangerous one of obeying the royal command. The first sight of Westminster, with every gate doubly guarded and every street swarming with archers, told him that he had walked into a trap: when the banquet was over he disappeared into captivity without any noise more effective than a mouse's squeak.

On the following day the members of the royal council met for dinner at the New June. After dinner Lord Huntingdon ordered John Marland to clear the room of all squires and servants, to place a guard of archers in the passage, and to keep the door himself.

As he stood there alone at the end of the great chamber and looked on at the brilliant party gathered round the table John was suddenly carried back to the castle of Calais, where seven years ago he had listened so breathlessly to the discussion on the tactics of St Inglebert. A tournament! how small an affair and how devoid of consequence! Here was a kingdom in debate, and a king to lead the onset; yet great as was the difference there was one element common to the two meetings—Huntingdon was of the party. John consoled himself with a glance at his own lord, young and strong and sanguine, the picture of hope and honour. Then the king began to speak, and he forgot everything and every one else.

“My friends,” said Richard, “you will forgive me if I am less merry to-day than you have sometimes known me. Love is a strange tree; its fruit is sweet at first and bitter at the ripest. I have called you together here to say farewell.”

He stopped suddenly, and a shock passed through all his hearers; the profound and unexpected melancholy of his tone struck upon their nerves as the first sweep of a skilled hand strikes along the harp-strings.

His lips moved as if to speak again, but no words followed; he turned and turned the gold cup in his hand, and kept his eyes fixed upon it as though he could not trust himself to face the sympathy of his friends. John felt the beads start

upon his forehead; he stirred uneasily and saw others do the same; beyond doubt they also were feeling that life held some unexpected mystery, some great and terrible secret that they were about to discover when it was too late.

"It is vain," said Richard at last, "but surely it is natural, that now, in the one hour left to us, I should think only of the past. For twenty years I have borne the name of King of England. Remind me, if you will, of my mistakes; but speak of them mercifully, for if they have never been forgiven, they have at least been repented many times. And in those years we have known some good days, you and I; we have seen England pass from war to peace, from wealth to prosperity; we have loved much, and lost much, and laid up something for memory. And now judgment has been given and the end has come: I have held my crown on sufferance, and at last the sufferance is to cease."

He raised his head and looked slowly round the table with the wide sad eyes of a wounded hart. There was still a dead silence among his hearers, but their amazement and indignation were upon the point of bursting forth. Lancaster alone seemed less moved; but York was ashy pale, Huntingdon's fist was clenched, and Kent was leaning forward from the end of the table with his lips parted and his breath caught in.

The king held up his hand. "Stay," he said, "you have not heard me: it is not of myself that

I have to speak, or I should not be speaking with regret. The passing of a king is but a change of names: the record of the greatest of us is nothing more than the epitaph upon the tomb of a buried age. Since I cannot rule, it is little to me that I may not reign. But you are men, with life and will of your own: it is hard that you, too, should die into the darkness like evening shadows."

Huntingdon could restrain himself no longer: he had glanced all round and found nothing to reassure him; Lancaster's frown was inscrutable, York was clearly sick with terror, Nottingham seemed cowed with shame, and the rest were all bewildered. His own voice came in a dry croak that confirmed the general panic.

"Sir," he said, "if our enemies are upon us, why do we sit here? For God's sake let us get to horse."

The phrase was one of doubtful meaning, but Richard did not misinterpret the tone.

"Where would you fly?" he asked, with a bitter little smile. "What covert will hide you from the lords of the forest? We hear the horn to-day, but their nets were laid a month ago."

"The worse for them!" cried Kent, starting to his feet; "treason a month old is doubly rotten. Sir! let us hear it all: it may be worse than we think, but I swear they shall never make a hunt of it."

"Well said!" cried half-a-dozen voices at once;

and if feelings could be heard, John, too, would have been among the loudest.

Again the king raised his hand, but this time his look was alert and his manner almost brisk; his voice came firm and clear, and he spoke in a tone of courage and good sense.

“Let me not be misjudged,” he said; “I, too, would fight if there were still time; but while we thought ourselves at peace, the work of sedition has been going forward busily. My uncle of Gloucester is an active man: a month since at St Albans, a week ago at Arundel, yesterday in his own domain of Pleshey—be sure we only hear the news when he has cut us off from France, and made certain of what force he thinks sufficient for his purpose. To capture and imprison his king—what is that? a single stroke, a short and easy business for so powerful a man; but he must have made thorough preparations before he dared to issue death-warrants for all my Council.”

He paused a moment, while this astounding news took effect, and then added, “I have no doubt myself; he has arranged for the Commons to rise at his signal all round London. Hunt or no hunt, our enemies have us penned in a circle.”

“Then we must break it,” cried Lord Kent, taking the lead once more.

“Ay, Sir,” Huntingdon joined in: “we have the Cheshire archers and the City troops; let us fling them on the weakest point of the circle.”

"No!" said Kent, as quick as lightning. "Strike at the heart, Sir, where one blow may save all; let us ride to-night for Pleshey."

His enthusiasm blew into sudden flame the anger and alarm of those about him: Salisbury sprang to his feet and sent his chair backwards with a crash. A general stir followed, and Richard saw that his time had come. He rose with great dignity, lifted his clenched right hand with the gesture of one who brandishes a sword, and cried in a ringing tone such as none had heard from him since he rode to meet Wat Tyler, "My lords, the Earl of Kent has spoken for me: I strike at the heart, and I strike to-night."

In a moment the meeting was broken into groups and the room filled with a babel of fierce inquiry and denunciation. John, who had no one to advise or consult, watched the faces of the rest. He fancied that he could trace a line of division that marked them off into one or the other of two parties: there seemed to be one set of those who knew nothing but what they had just heard, and one of those who knew more and cared less to speak of it aloud. Lancaster kept the king so closely in conversation that no one else could get a word with either of them; York, still harassed by miserable unrest, was trying to approach his son Rutland without attracting too much notice. Nottingham was speaking in an undertone to Derby, who evidently wished to be rid of him; John started as he remembered having heard that they were both at

Arundel a few days ago; if it had fallen to Nottingham to inform against his father-in-law little wonder that he bore a hang-dog look, and less that his fellow-informers shunned him. It was a relief to see that John's own friends were among the ignorant and openly indignant party. Kent, Huntingdon, and Salisbury had all been equally taken by surprise, and it was they who now showed the greatest alacrity in the preparation of the expedition.

By four o'clock all friends had been warned, and the Lord Mayor had received the king's command to furnish as many troops as possible within two hours. By five the Cheshire archers had been collected and equipped; and at six o'clock precisely—the hour at which he usually went to supper—Richard, in full armour, with an advance guard of two thousand men behind him, rode up Tower Hill to the cheers of an excited and bewildered crowd of citizens, and disappeared in a storm of dust and trumpeting along the road to Bow.

With him went the Earls of Rutland, Kent, Huntingdon, and Nottingham; the Dukes of Lancaster and York took in charge the Tower and the Palace of Westminster; and all night long Derby and Salisbury were forwarding reinforcements—a thousand or more, it was said, were hurried eastward every hour. As to the enemy, no one had any idea who or where he was, but he was reported to have not less than a hundred thousand men, furnished with springals, scorpions, and bombards of enormous size.

XL.

THE king rode fast, and easily outstripped the wild rumours that his expedition was raising. Town after town along the eastward road received him with a hubbub of surprise, and stood staring after him as he disappeared, leaving the quiet summer evening to settle down again under a layer of dust. At Brentwood, where he halted for half an hour, his officers passed the word round that he was going to Hadleigh, and so to France; at Ingatestone the story was of Harwich and Sluys; but at Chelmsford, where he was to lie till dawn, the further precaution was taken of closing all the roads. The Earl of Huntingdon, after setting a chain of patrols on the north side of the town, slipped off behind them with a following of ten men to reconnoitre towards Pleshey: and Richard with the rest of his party sat down to supper.

Before midnight Huntingdon returned: two of his men had knocked up a stable-boy at the castle under pretence of asking their way to Chelmsford: they gathered that the Duke was at home but had only his household with him; the crowd of men who commonly wore his livery and carried arms in his service were for the most part away,—holiday making, it was said.

A murmur of scornful incredulity greeted this

report. "No doubt," said the king, "my uncle was to join their festivity to-morrow: if we detain him here, we must at least provide him with some compensating pastime."

His lips shut grimly upon the bitter little jest, and he rose to leave the table. "We start in three hours," he added, and stalked from the room still frowning.

While he slept the four earls discussed the situation. Wherever Gloucester's forces might be, it seemed clear that Lord Kent's advice had proved good: the king by his rapid march had placed himself outside the circle instead of inside it, and appeared to have his most formidable enemy within his grasp. But to make doubly sure a company of archers under Swynnerton's command was sent out to draw a cordon round the Duke's stronghold, and messengers were despatched along the London road with an order for the first of the reinforcements to draw out to the north as far as the village of High Easter, so that the king's final advance would be secured against any possible movement from the west.

The sky was already blue when Richard left his lodging, and the sun rose as he passed Great Waltham and halted his little army in the fields beyond. Once more Huntingdon was sent ahead of the main force; the rest following more slowly after a short interval. Everyone believed that success was already assured: but that did not prevent excitement from

running high as the decisive moment drew near, for it is the stake, after all, and not the balance of chances, that raises the player's pulse, and here it was nothing less than life that depended upon the cast.

This time, for a reason known only to himself and his master, John was to ride with Huntingdon. It had occurred to someone that Lord Stafford was not unlikely to be with the Duke, in whose service he had been for some years before he succeeded to his brother's earldom: and Lord Kent, since he could not be present with the advance guard himself, sent on his squire with secret orders to do everything in his power to prevent any revival of the personal bitterness between the houses of Stafford and Holland.

John felt when he took the road in the fresh July morning that he stood at last upon the frontiers of happiness. The hour and the work chimed together as he listened to the steady rattle of hoofs behind him: the whole future shone in the light of this first success, and he exulted in the recollection that it was his own lord, his own pupil, who had planned the stroke.

It added to his pleasure that he himself had a part to play. He did not believe that Lord Stafford was in the castle, and in this he proved to be right: but it was his business to give Huntingdon as little time as possible for any characteristic behaviour: the easiest way was evidently to delay him until the

king should be close upon his heels. He accordingly suggested to him a caution that he was far from feeling himself, and his bait was swallowed at once. Huntingdon was apt to be afraid of everything but a physical contest: provided that the work was done promptly and remorselessly, he always preferred that responsibility should rest on any shoulders rather than his own, and in the present case he was not yet confident of success. He advanced therefore with a great show of precaution, and only reached the inner gate of the castle when Richard's body-guard were already within a mile of the place.

The household was still wrapped in slumber: a drowsy porter opened without challenge, and disappeared to call some of the upper servants.

Five minutes passed, during which John watched the sun rising above the trees, and fell into a day-dream of great splendour. He was roused by the voice of Lord Huntingdon close beside his ear.

"What does this mean?"

"This waiting?" replied John,—“they seem quite unprepared.”

“Too unprepared,” said the Earl. “I don't like it: there's double-dealing somewhere. I've half a mind to fall back on the supports.”

But at this moment the porter reappeared, and was followed immediately by one of the gentlewomen of the household, who explained that the Duke and Duchess were not yet up, but would be glad to receive Lord Huntingdon shortly.

The Earl was still suspicious and sulky. "Are there no men in this house?" he growled.

The answer was lost: a tremendous blare of trumpets came through the outer gate, and Richard himself rode into the base-court.

"The king, madam," said John to the astonished gentlewoman, and she fled upstairs again with the news.

XLI.

RICHARD rang out his orders in a sharp soldier-like tone to the officer in command of his bodyguard. The Duke's porters were at once replaced by archers: and the king, after receiving Huntingdon's report, dismounted and advanced at a slow ceremonial pace to the foot of the stone steps which led up into the house.

He had scarcely reached them when the Duke of Gloucester appeared in the doorway and hurried down to receive his royal guest. At the first glance John knew that the game was won, for beyond doubt this was not only a guilty but a frightened man. His hair was disordered, his feet shuffled in fur-lined slippers, and the half-fastened cloak which he had thrown over his shoulders parted now and again as he scurried out, revealing a white shirt and bare

shins underneath. The spectators who stood nearest averted their eyes, either from instinctive respect for a man in dire extremity, or perhaps from a feeling that such indecorum must be ignored or it would tarnish the glory of their own triumph. John certainly would rather have seen his enemy appear in full armour with a thousand men at his back: he had an ugly moment of misgiving, but it was gone again as he looked towards the king.

Richard had never been more royal or more magnanimous: by the mingled courtesy and sternness of his manner, the wide serenity of his look, he seemed to confer upon the dishevelled figure before him an equal share of the dignity with which he was himself robed and crowned.

“Welcome, Sir, welcome,” said the Duke. As he went down on one knee to kiss the king’s hand his other bare leg protruded from the open cloak more ludicrously than ever, but no one smiled; Huntingdon alone looked full at him without disguising his cruel satisfaction.

Richard raised his uncle with grave and almost compassionate courtesy. It was strange to see how completely and easily he dominated this rebellious old soldier, who had tyrannised over him so long, threatened him openly with deposition, and hunted his nearest friends to death. In the days of his greatest insolence Gloucester had never mastered Richard as Richard was mastering Gloucester now.

"May I ask, Sir," said the Duke, "how it is that your Majesty comes so early and so unexpectedly?"

Richard put the question by with perfect self-possession. "If you will make yourself ready," he answered, "you shall ride some way with me: I have to confer with you on business."

Gloucester bowed and was about to withdraw, but Richard laid a careless hand upon his shoulder. The Duchess was at the moment coming out, and it was in this reassuring position that she found her husband and the king. When she had reached the bottom of the steps Richard released the Duke and turned to greet her. "I am borrowing my uncle from you," he said. His tone was polite, but it told her nothing, and he continued to hold her eyes with a steady look that gave her no opportunity of exchanging a glance with her husband.

She turned, however, with an effort, and forced a little laugh. "I must dress him better before I can let you take him," she said, and held out a hand as if to lead the Duke away.

The king laughed too, but far more naturally. "You would dress him too well, madam," he said, "and take too long about it: if you will give me the pleasure of your company meanwhile, I will send him suitable attendance."

He cast a look round the circle as if to make an indifferent choice; but before he could speak Huntingdon thrust himself in front.

"I will go," he said; "I know him best."

The Duchess turned pale and looked at the king.

“My brother is not very neat-handed,” said Richard, “but I daresay he will be able to do all that is necessary.”

The Duke went up the steps without a word, and Huntingdon after him. To more than one of those who stood by they seemed to be mounting a scaffold: Huntingdon’s sword clanked horribly against step after step as he followed close behind his prisoner.

Only the king appeared to be unaware of anything strained or ominous in the scene before him. He turned with a cordial air to the Duchess, who was standing white and silent among her gentlewomen. “And now, ladies,” he said, “what have you to show us while we are waiting?”

Eleanor, Duchess of Gloucester, was a very great lady and as brave as a Bohun should be: also, she knew Richard well, and had seen him act many parts. Half an hour was all that was left to her, and she braced herself to spend every minute of it in the struggle for her husband’s life. She felt instinctively that the lighter the king’s manner was, the more deadly must be the purpose it concealed; her business was to force him out into the open, to dare him to look at his intentions by daylight and in the presence of others. She flung off her terror with a quick movement of resolution, and the colour came back to her face; her tone was almost as easy as Richard’s own.

"I fear, Sir," she answered, "that my house is unfit to be seen at this time of day; we are not such early risers here; but the chapel is always in order, and we are rather proud of it."

She led the way to a door at the side of the base-court; the king followed more slowly, exchanging a word or two of compliment with each of the attendant ladies as he passed through the group. When the chapel door was unlocked he stepped just inside it and looked about him; the place was small, and he had evidently no intention of spending time upon it.

"The windows are fine," he said, "and the wood-work: you have no room, I suppose, for canopies." He turned his head slowly in every direction with an assumed air of thoroughness, and prepared to move out again.

"The jewels hardly show from here," remarked the Duchess, "but they are good, I believe; the gold plate is Spanish—a present from the Lancasters."

The lure was thrown with a sure hand, and Richard stooped to it instantly: he loved jewels even more than dress, and he burned to see these, which would so soon be his own. The Duchess led him up to the altar, at the back of which were reared two tiers of magnificent plates of beaten gold, with a jewelled pyx in the centre. Immediately below this stood a casket of goldsmith's work, shaped like a miniature chapel with high-pitched roof and pinnacles: it glittered all over with the precious stones of every kind which

were worked into the decoration; and many of them were of great size and beauty.

The Duchess made a profound obeisance before the altar; Richard followed her example mechanically, but he hardly for an instant took his eyes off the jewels. She stepped between him and the altar, took up the casket and turned to place it in his hands. His eyes were riveted upon it: emerald, ruby, amethyst, and chrysoprase, he pored over them all in turn, and his fingers passed lovingly along the row of huge pearls that topped the pinnacles on each side of the miniature roof.

"My uncle is not too careful of his treasures," he said at last; "this seems well worth stealing."

The Duchess did not return his smile. "Who dare steal such a thing?" she said gravely. "There are very sacred relics in this—a fragment of the True Cross, and some of the Confessor's hair."

Richard looked as embarrassed as she had meant him to be: his peculiar devotion to the Confessor's memory was well known. He moved forward as if intending to replace the casket. But the Duchess kept her position between him and the altar: she laid one hand upon the reliquary and pressed it firmly into his grasp. "Keep it, Sir," she said; "all that we hold we hold only of you."

She spoke with dignity and self-restraint. Richard seemed to realise that he was losing ground. "No, no," he said quickly, "I cannot take it in that way."

"Then, Sir," she replied, "give me, if you will, some-

thing in return for it." She kept her hand steadily upon the casket and looked him in the face.

The king frowned: he was making up his mind to break off at any cost. She saw that the strain must be relaxed at once or she would fail entirely; her hand drew back from the reliquary as she said in a quiet natural voice, "My lord of Huntingdon has never understood us: it is not good for my husband that they should be together."

Richard looked at her with the wide innocent gaze that so often served him for a mask. "Is that what you ask of me?"

"I ask only that, because I believe that it would mean everything to me and mine." She searched his face, but no eyes could have penetrated that mask.

"Look," he said quietly, then while he supported the casket with his left hand and forearm he placed his right hand upon it with the gesture of one who takes an oath, "I give you my word that your husband shall neither see nor hear Lord Huntingdon again until he asks for him. And now take back your reliquary: a king can only receive such a gift from a king's hand."

To this she dared no answer, but took the casket and lifted it high above her head, falling on her knees as she replaced it upon the altar, and remaining for a moment or two bowed in prayer before it. The oath must not go unrecorded.

Richard meanwhile was beckoning to John Marland, who stood among the group near the door.

"Bring my brother Huntingdon," he said, and turned back to offer the Duchess his hand.

They left the chapel in silence, and the door was locked again; a moment afterwards Huntingdon came clanking down the steps into the court.

"John," said the king, "I am sorry to find that your presence is unwelcome here. You will leave me the archers now on the ground, and fall back at once on London with all the rest. Take your leave of my aunt, the Duchess of Gloucester: I have promised her that you shall not come here again without an invitation."

Huntingdon took this for a jest, and a very good one. "Good-bye then, madam," he said, "for some time, it appears."

"Oh, I hope not," replied the Duchess courteously; she could not afford to rebuke his triumph, and he was well aware of it.

"We never know, do we?" he sneered.

But this time he had pushed her beyond endurance; her face burned as she thrust back, and her voice was a fierce appeal to the justice of fate.

"No, my lord, we never know."

He lowered his eyes as he turned away to mount.

XLII.

JOHN was glad enough to see Huntingdon go: he was still more pleased to find ten minutes later that Lord Kent had been told off, with Sir Thomas Percy, the Steward of the Household, to attend on the Duke. The king, after giving this order, started at once, leaving Gloucester to follow as soon as he should have taken farewell of his wife.

There was a consideration in all this that raised the Duke's hopes: little by little the idea crept into his mind that possibly his case was not quite desperate, else why should his deadliest enemy have been dismissed and guardians so different have been appointed in his place? Besides, Kent was not only a young man of presumably amiable character: he was a near connection of Gloucester's, for the Duchess and Tom's mother were first cousins.

So the parting scene was almost cheerful; and Gloucester's last words to his wife were spoken loud enough for all to hear. "Keep close to the king," he said, "and tell him boldly you will swear by any oath he pleases that I have never wished him ill or been a traitor to his person." He mounted, and turned away with a wave of the hand.

"And now," he said gaily to the lords who were

waiting for him, "which way shall we go? and who shall be our guide? I, or one of you?"

Kent frowned and said nothing; Percy was more equal to the occasion. "Nay, sir," he replied, reining in his horse for the Duke to pass before him, "it is for you to lead and for us to follow."

The claims of dignity were satisfied. "Then come," said the Duke, "let us set forth in God's name—wherever it is your pleasure that I should go."

They rode to Hadleigh; dined there and took ship an hour afterwards. When night fell the prisoner was safe in the Castle of Calais.

XLIII.

ARUNDEL'S surrender followed close upon that of Gloucester; with him fell his brother, the Archbishop; and the less important members of the party were taken in one sweep of the net. The king's success had not suffered a moment's check; if he had but laid and matured his plans as carefully ten years before, De Vere might have been living now. This was the sourness in the wine of triumph, and he was seen more than once to glower ominously on Nottingham and Derby, the only two among his present supporters who had

been with the opposition on the fatal day of Radcot Bridge. But there were sweeter revenges to be poured out before these could be thought of, and the drinking of such noble liquor demanded ceremonious observance.

The Great Council was summoned to meet at Nottingham, but not until the fifth of August; the intervening month was spent in going minutely through the case against the prisoners, issuing proclamations, preparing admissions, and above all in arranging and rearranging a procedure the outcome of which was not in doubt. In this, as in other crises in his life, Richard showed himself a born actor, a consummate master of pageantry; where a practical man would have been content to ensure results, the artist in him devoted even more care to the perfection of the manner.

His friends followed him enthusiastically, but in very different moods. The elder among them gave their time and wits to the work of ruining their enemies and securing the plunder: the younger ones expanded suddenly like flowers in a late hot spring; they ran riot in a luxuriance of extravagant colour, mostly harmless enough, but altogether disorderly. Their dress was fantastic, their heraldry overpowering, and their conversation regilded half the roll of the nobility.

Lord Kent alone was less entirely absorbed in all this upholstery: his gain from the victory was to be of a different kind, and if he desired an ac-

cession of rank it was not merely for his own sake. "Come with me," he said gaily to John on the morning after the arrest of Lord Arundel, "let us go and ask Joan to name her Duchy."

John was aware that the Staffords were in London, and that his lord had more than once been fortunate in contriving a meeting; but a surprise was waiting for him to-day. To begin with, the visitors were received by young Lord Stafford with unaccustomed cordiality. Then John perceived by the discreet vanishing of squires and underlings and the summoning of several older members of the family, that the occasion was regarded as in some way important and confidential. Lord Stafford himself, though nervous, was evidently not unprepared. When the customary civilities of wine and spices had been offered and the last servant had left the room, he began at once without any preamble.

"I am glad you happened to call to-day," he said rather stiffly, "because I have at last come to a decision upon the question we discussed some time ago."

Tom turned suddenly white: hopes cannot cease to be hopes without a pang, whether of death or of birth.

"You honoured me," Lord Stafford continued, "with a proposal." He waited as if for some indication that the proposal was still on foot.

"I did," said Tom. "I mean I did make a proposal, and I came this morning to repeat it."

"Then I have now the pleasure of informing you . . ." The measured tones ceased abruptly; the two young lords looked at one another, and a smile broke over both their faces at the same moment.

Tom held out his hand. "Thank you," he said fervently as the other grasped it. "You can't think what it means to me."

"Oh, well," replied Stafford, "it means a good deal to us too, you know."

"Very good of you to say so."

"Oh!" cried Stafford again. "Of course I meant that as well, but I do think besides having the ordinary feelings we ought to do something to wipe out old scores."

He looked aside at the nearest of his friends as if in need of prompting. Tom seemed to catch a glimpse of something awkward approaching: his voice hardened.

"Certainly," he said, "we wipe them out entirely: you give me your sister, and the whole thing is at an end."

Considering on which side the wrong lay, this was a very naïve piece of magnanimity; but Lord Stafford could not make up his mind to say so. He looked embarrassed and was silent.

"I daresay you would like to see my sister," he said at last; and carried Tom away with him. John was left to wait with the elderly gentleman who had seemed to be in Lord Stafford's confidence.

His companion was a fluent talker, and spoke with

great propriety of the advantages to be gained by forgetting and forgiving old injuries, more especially in the case of persons of rank and influence. John was inattentive, thinking of his own share in this new partnership; but at last the constant repetition of the word "advantages" made an impression upon him.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "I'm afraid I was wandering; what are the particular advantages you were speaking of?"

This was uncomfortably direct; the old gentleman raised his eyebrows with a conscious little smile.

"I am sure," he said, "that you have for Lord Kent all the affection of a devoted servant."

"Certainly I have," replied John in surprise.

"Lord Stafford stood for years in the same relation to the Duke of Gloucester," said the old gentleman, "and it would not be unnatural if he founded some hopes upon his new alliance."

The suggestion was revolting to John. "I am sorry to differ from you," he replied haughtily; "but this is a marriage we are making, not a bargain."

"A marriage," replied the old gentleman blandly, "is always a bargain—a bargain in which a man pays just what the article is worth to him."

Lord Kent's return saved John from a quarrel: on the way home he poured out his indignation to his master, who took it with the light good-humour of a happy man. "Poor old Gloucester," he said.

"I daresay he was not the worst of them: at least he did his grumbling openly."

"But to bargain with you at such a moment," John's indignation persisted.

"Oh, that's all nonsense, of course," replied his lord. "I go my own way; but, all the same, I'm not inclined to go to extremes."

John was intensely annoyed at his attitude, and determined to cure this ill-judged tenderness: his anger was none the less hot when he remembered that in so doing he would be carrying out the old Earl's last instructions.

XLIV.

THERE are times when Fortune makes an irresistible alliance with Youth. The king had desired to postpone his nephew's marriage until quieter times, but Lord Kent was now so valuable and popular a member of the party that it would have been difficult to refuse him anything upon which he had really set his heart. As it happened, it was a lucky stroke—an impromptu and almost random suggestion—that brought Richard completely over. A day or two before the meeting of the Great Council, on a drowsy August afternoon, when the proceedings to be taken against

the traitors were being informally discussed for the twentieth time, Tom woke up from a day-dream to find that his own opinion was demanded.

"Oh!" he cried hastily, "why not pay them back in their own coin? they called themselves Lords Appellant when they chased De Vere."

He had no need to finish: the imaginative touch—the appearance of poetic justice—was just what Richard needed to make his vengeance perfect. At the Great Council, therefore, the principal business transacted was an agreement that Gloucester, Warwick, Arundel, and the Archbishop should be impeached in the coming session of Parliament by six earls and two barons, acting together under the title of Lords Appellant; and Kent, Huntingdon, Nottingham, Rutland, and Salisbury were to be among the number. Derby was not, and it was whispered by some that he had refused to be nominated; others declared that he was terrified at the omission of his name from a list where even Nottingham's appeared.

The Council over, Richard found himself once more with time on his hands; for Parliament was not to meet until the middle of September. He was in high good-humour and overflowing with bounty for his friends.

"Well, my Lord Appellant," he said the same evening, putting his arm round Tom's neck as they left the supper-room, "what can I do for you?"

"Come to my wedding," replied the Lord Appellant without a moment's hesitation.

"I had thought," said the king, "that the Dukedom should be your wedding present: if you cannot wait for that I must give you something else." He beckoned to John, who was waiting to conduct his master to his lodging.

"Marland," said Richard, with his arm still on Tom's shoulder, "your lord is marrying, and I am to give him a house: shall it be Arundel or Warwick?"

John was stunned by the royal assurance of the jest: for these were two of the greatest castles in England, and their lawful owners had not yet been brought to trial. Still he must answer, and if his wits failed, his memory served him, even against his will.

"Warwick, Sir, I think," he stammered.

Richard saw his confusion. "What is your reason?" he asked.

John dared not say "It would look better," but he remembered that even the old Earl had thought so. "There are the horses, Sir," he replied.

"So there are," said Richard. "Those famous horses: I had forgotten you were Master of the Horse."

John bowed in silence: the king thought him an odd but clever fellow; to himself he seemed to be the sport of some malicious demon.

XLV.

TEN days later, on the 15th of August, Thomas, Earl of Kent, and Lady Joan, sister of the Earl of Stafford, were married in the cathedral church of Lichfield. The ceremony was performed by the Right Reverend Doctor Scrope, the Lord Bishop of the Diocese, and was honoured by the presence of King Richard and Queen Isabella, uncle and aunt of the bridegroom. This was the first solemnity of the kind which the Queen had witnessed since she herself became a married lady of seven: it was, in fact, the only wedding, except her own, which she could remember at all, and she took the most inquiring interest in the bride. Her Majesty was graciously pleased to weep at the parting two days afterwards, when the Earl and Countess of Kent left for the house in Yorkshire kindly lent them by Sir John Colville.

With them went Margaret Ingleby; and John, with others of the household, was already a day's journey in advance. He had many perplexities and resolves in his mind, but they were for the most part shouldered aside by pleasanter thoughts. This return to the Yorkshire moors seemed like a return to a happier age, where summer and gaiety were perpetual, and where the greedy turmoil of the world was hardly even a distant reality, hardly more

than a topic for an idle day's argument between friends.

His mood was the gentler because he knew that Nicholas Love, who now rode beside him, would not be his companion much longer. The Carthusian's absence from his fraternity during these years of his lord's youth was entirely contrary to the very strict rule of the Order: it had only been made possible by a special dispensation granted at the royal request: that was in the early days when the Hollands, for the merest fancy, would use the king's name as freely as their own. Nicholas' tutorship had latterly been a nominal one; now that Tom and Edmund had each an independent establishment the last pretext for keeping him was gone, and he had claimed his right to go back to his cell and his books.

But for John even his friendship with Nicholas was not the chief landmark of the happy country to which he was returning. To the wildwood and the moorlands other feelings were more appropriate—feelings akin to the ardour of the chase, the instinct to pursue without a thought beyond the joy of pursuit. His lord, being in love himself, had assumed, with the egotistic good-nature of youth, that the intimacy between John and Margaret Ingleby must be of the same kind, and even of the same degree, or nearly so. Yet they had seen but little of each other since that memorable day at Arncliffe, and whenever they had chanced to meet they had fenced, almost fought, upon the terms which Margaret had

laid down from the first. There could be no compromise between the supporters of contending principles—between those who upheld the king's right as divine, and those who would limit it as with bit and bridle.

Still there was this much justification for the good-natured egotist, that each of them found more pleasure in fighting the other than in agreeing with any one else; and in John's picture of the coming month the tall, proud figure of a young Diana was for ever flitting under hazel arches or springing across the long roll of the heather.

A week later the vision was once more a reality. The newly-wedded lovers were eager to revisit the scene of their first meeting. On the morning after their arrival at Arncliffe Tom and the two ladies started up the steep, overhanging slope before the heat of the day had begun, leaving John and Nicholas to walk to Bordelby, where Edmund was hawking, and where the whole party was to meet for their midday meal. At the parting of the ways Margaret lingered a moment behind her companions. "I shall not follow them long," she said to John. "They don't want me."

John nodded. "But you will be with us at dinner?"

"I think not; but, of course," she added with her haughty little air of mock-humility, "I shall do whatever they bid me." Her eyes, like a fountain, tossed up a flashing spray of laughter; as it fell

again she broke away and went quickly up the wood with the light step that he remembered. He stood for a moment staring after her in a kind of trembling wonder. Look, voice, movement—they were all as he had known them before. What, then, was new, and why had this meaningless little incident taken on the clear, inexplicable significance of a scene in dreamland? Was the magic in the summer morning, or in the place and its associations?

He walked beside his friend in silence: they took the shadier way through the centre of the wood, and paced the green aisles slowly, enjoying once more the dappled gold on the mossy path at their feet.

“John,” said the monk at last, “you have often confessed to me: I will confess to you. My contempt for earthly beauty is not so perfect as it has been.”

He stopped, and lifted his hand towards the long vista of the wood.

“You feel it too?” asked John; “something disturbing, something almost terrible?”

“On the contrary,—something that heals and pacifies. It may be a delusion of the Evil One, but I feel that here I could both worship and work as I have never done elsewhere.”

John looked down as if to search his own mind. “Yes,” he said at last, “it is a good place; we are all at our best here: but you find it pacifying and I find it agitating to be uplifted.”

They walked on more rapidly. When they came to the ridge above the hollow dell and looked down

upon the hunting lodge of Bordelby, the monk stopped again. "It is a good place," he murmured. "There is none like it."

John replied to the thought rather than the words. "I could not stay here long: it is out of the world, out of life altogether."

The monk bowed his head, and his neck and temples were dyed with a flush that his companion knew well. "*I am going out of the world, John,*" he said in a low restrained voice; "am I going out of life?"

John's lips suddenly trembled. "You are going out of my life, Nicholas."

The monk did not stir; his figure had become almost rigid, his eyes were still downcast and closed, and his hands were clasped under his white scapular, where his rosary made a faint, cold, rattling sound. John turned from him in despair and flung himself down upon the ground. There he lay for a long time, hidden among the tall bracken, plucking the grass bents and biting them one after another, as he mused rebelliously on the mutual hindrance of life and religion. When at last he was roused by the sound of footsteps moving near him, and lifted his head above the deep tangle of the fern, Nicholas had disappeared, and Margaret Ingleby was standing in the place where he had been.

XLVI.

JOHN sprang to his feet. "Margaret!" he cried in astonishment.

"Yes," she replied shortly. "They would have it, so we are both disappointed."

"Disappointed?"

"You expected to see someone else, I hoped to be alone."

He saw that she was not in her usual mood of combative gaiety; there was something almost bitter in the sincerity of her tone.

"If I am in your way——" he began, with a pretence of leaving her.

"No!" she returned imperiously. "It is a mercy to find someone to speak to who is not a lord. Besides," she added, "you are an enemy, and just now I would rather talk to an enemy than a friend."

He thought he detected a returning gleam.

"Shall we fight standing or sitting?" he asked.

The gleam broadened as she sat down, but it died away again. There was a silence which seemed long to John, but he spent it in watching her face, which was steadily turned towards the little plateau of Bordelby below them. In the level meadow the hay was being carried; the garden fence beyond was topped by the tall yellow heads of the great mullein, and from the house itself a

thin column of smoke ascended like a faint blue mist, only visible against the dark green of the oakwood, but giving the final touch of homeliness to the little picture.

Presently she spoke. "Is this place so much to Dom Nicholas?"

The deep ring of her voice always stirred John: now that it chimed so with his latest thoughts it startled him.

"It is much to us all," he replied evasively.

"So much that you give it away—and to monks!"

This time there was no mistaking the bitterness of her mood: and he discovered at the same moment that he could not endure bitterness between himself and her. Hitherto her splendid self-reliance and audacity had always enabled him to play fast and loose with the manners of chivalry, the conventional code which had trained him from boyhood to be the humble servant of all ladies; for her pleasure and his own he had treated her as an adversary and an equal. But now she was in pain, and whatever the cause, she must be protected: saved from such new wounds as might come from her own passion or from any word of his.

"Won't you tell me?" he asked. "I know nothing of this."

"Ah! then it was really a sudden fancy: but only the more insolent for that! Yes, I will tell you: your master and mine has conceived the pious idea of dedicating a monastery to Saint Nicholas—

down there." Her eyes were still fixed upon the plateau below.

"Oh!" said John as if relieved. "The idlest of fancies, it must be: of course he knows the title is in dispute—he can't deal with anything but the house."

"The house! It would make a single cell!"

Her scorn was justified: John remembered the scale of the great cloister at Pavia.

"That is quite true," he said; "if the idea were ever to be seriously thought of, your father's consent must be asked first—he would have to be a co-founder."

"Why stay for that?" she retorted. "It is the fashion now to take, not to ask, and who is more in the fashion than the Earl of Kent?"

John was hurt. "He does not break the law," he said as gently as he could.

"There is no law to break," she cried. "Your Lords Appellant are above the law."

"They are not above the king."

The flame leaped higher as this name was flung upon it.

"The king! What have the king and law to do with one another? Which of them gave Warwick's house to his enemy before Warwick had been heard in his own defence?"

The thrust was a hard one, but happily John was not unprepared to meet it. He had himself

been astonished by this offer of Richard's and had thought the matter out on the ride northward.

"I know," he replied, in a grave and uncontentious tone; "the same thing occurred to me too: but let us not be hasty. We are not in possession of the facts, and the king is, or believes that he is: his conscience has nothing to do with our doubts. That is the advantage of any form of absolute government, as I saw when I was in Italy: a Council of Ten, or better still, a single ruler like Gian Galeazzo, can judge in secret, and act with certainty: you can never do either with parliaments or courts of law. We all know what lawyers' justice is, and how little two contending parties in the State weigh the merits of any case. The king, as we think, should be above party, and above technicalities: he should be perfectly informed and perfectly irresponsible. Then you get, not legal justice, but real justice; in a case like Warwick's——" he stopped, and looked at Margaret; but she turned her face still farther away from him.

"Perhaps I have said too much," he continued; "but I wanted to show you that we do what we do deliberately — from conviction, not from weakness."

She was still silent, with averted eyes: under the strain his caution began to fail him a little.

"You think I am playing the advocate; well—think what you like of me, of all the rest of us;

but don't misjudge the man who has married your friend. I assure you most positively—I swear to you by the life of my soul—that he would never touch a yard of any man's land unjustly, or accept the spoils of the innocent. If he takes Warwick's house, it is because Warwick is guilty. I know him as no one else does, and I cannot be wrong about that. You might as well accuse Saint George."

She bowed her head, and he saw that she was sobbing.

"Ah!" he cried in despair. "Have I spoken hotly—what a brute I am—or was it what I said about Warwick?"

She dried part of her tears, and swallowed the rest: then looked round at him all radiant.

"It was what you said about everything," she said with one more little sob of content, "and I wish you would always speak hotly."

She rose to her feet, still with soft eyes of gratitude upon him, and held out her hand. He fell upon his knees and kissed it passionately; for he, too, was stirred beyond control.

XLVII.

JOHN had made a fortunate stroke as well as a bold one: his confidence in his lord not only advanced him with Margaret, it was completely justified by the event. When the business of arranging for a foundation at Bordelby came before the lawyers they advised that the title to the property was not good enough to proceed upon, and Lord Kent accordingly invited the Ingleby family to become joint-patrons with him of the proposed monastery. To this they readily consented; their interest was divided among a number of relations, the cost to each would be but small, and the honour considerable. Sir John Ingleby, the head of the house, though in general opposed to the king's party, was a devoted adherent of the Staffords, and could refuse nothing to the new Lady Kent. The project, therefore, needed only the royal licence, and as this was to be had for the asking the work was put in hand at once.

The second of John's conjectures was even more signally confirmed by Warwick's complete admission of his own and his fellow-conspirators' guilt. Parliament had been summoned for September 17, and the Lords had been warned to come armed and attended. They met, for the first time, under the roof of the Great Hall of Westminster, which

had just been rebuilt and enlarged: but neither within nor without was there any room to spare. London and Westminster were crowded beyond all experience: every one of the king's party had brought a small army with him, and the bulk of them — horse, foot, and followers — were quartered by hundreds in every village within a dozen miles of the capital. Richard himself lay at Eltham, surrounded by his new bodyguard of two thousand Cheshire archers. These men, the most loyal and disciplined soldiers in England, were the admiration of John and all his friends; to the other side they seemed "very rude and beastly people, few or none of them gentlemen, but very proud." The words are an apt illustration of the sharp and bitter difference of feeling between the two parties in the country, and it was but natural that the bitterness should be most keen against the Cheshire men, for the contending powers had been far more nearly balanced than at present appeared, and the scale had been turned decisively in Richard's favour by this one reliable force of yeomen.

For the time, then, the king's triumph was undisputed. He was able to announce to the two Houses that they would be spared the painful necessity of trying the Duke of Gloucester, who, after making a full confession in writing, had very opportunely died on the 27th August, "of the disease of which he had been labouring at the moment of his arrest." He was to be brought home

from Calais immediately, and buried in state in his own chapel at Pleshey. The impeachment of the remaining conspirators would be proceeded with in three or four days' time.

The trial, when it came, was a short one. Warwick pleaded guilty, and the high-spirited denials of Arundel, left alone to answer the eight Appellants, only made his case the more hopeless. If anything could have saved him it would have been his fierce reply to Derby, who could not let slip an opportunity of bettering his own credit by attacking a lion already in the toils. But the lion's wrath spared no one, from the king downward, and the end was not long delayed. When the formal verdict of "Guilty" had been recorded against all four of the traitors, the dead and the living, the Duke of Lancaster, as High Steward of England, pronounced sentence in the presence of the king, who listened with the serene and pitiless face of an avenging angel. The Duke of Gloucester's estates and honours were forfeited; the Earl of Warwick was banished to the Isle of Man, and all his possessions confiscated; the Archbishop was exiled for life—another touch of poetic justice, for his predecessor, Archbishop Neville, had suffered the same penalty at the hands of the old Lords Appellant in the days of Richard's humiliation.

For Arundel there could be nothing but death, sudden and exemplary; and Lancaster, in the customary form, sentenced the traitor to be drawn,

hanged, burned, beheaded, and quartered. Then, after a pause, he added: "The King our Sovereign Lord, of his grace, because thou art of his blood and one of the Peers of the realm, hath remitted all these pains unto the last, so only that thou lose thy head."

To John, who was waiting outside with other officers, the news was no surprise in itself; but it was a shock to find that the execution was to take place immediately, and to hear his lord's voice giving orders for all his people to attend him to Tower Hill. Huntingdon was close behind him, and Nottingham was ordering out one battalion of the mounted archers.

Lord Kent's horse was brought, and the crowd of retainers fell back: John stood by the stirrup and looked his master in the face. "Must *we* go this errand?" he asked, as he pretended to busy himself with the girth. Tom's face was pale and set; there was nothing ignoble in it. "Yes, John, we must," he said. "Nottingham is his son-in-law, and I am his nephew; no one will suspect *us* of revenge."

"My lord of Huntingdon?"

"He has no command," replied Kent. "I suppose he comes to see that we do not weaken." He spoke like one who has his own work to do, and no inclination to attend to the notions of others. John's heart was lightened a little: he felt that the tone was at any rate that of a man.

The procession was some time in forming. At last it moved off, Kent in front, and Nottingham, with nearly a thousand of the Cheshire men, in the rear. Huntingdon was left to his own devices, and he chose to thrust himself into the centre of the line, immediately behind the prisoner. As they left the precincts of the palace and entered the densely packed crowd outside, whom he rightly supposed to favour Lord Arundel, he took it upon himself to call a halt and order the condemned man to be bound for greater security. Arundel disdained such a persecutor as this, and quietly requested the sergeant who carried out the order to leave his hands free that he might be able to throw his last alms to the people. The man obeyed, and Huntingdon did not venture to interfere again; but he called out in his coarse, mirthless voice, "You should thank me, good folk; it is my money he is giving you so freely:" and was once more silenced by the ominous growling of the mob.

At Tower Hill he urged the prisoner to confess his guilt, and was again treated with silent scorn. Before he could repeat the insult Lord Kent made a sign to the executioner, who came forward and knelt before his victim, asking his forgiveness.

"It is not needed," said Lord Arundel, as he bent down and kissed his forehead with great dignity. Then he added: "Do your duty as you are commanded, but torment me not. Strike no more than once."

This was almost more than John could stand. He glanced sideways at his lord and saw that he too was shaken almost beyond endurance. But their misery was not yet over. When the executioner took up his axe Lord Arundel moved gravely towards him, and, with the air of one seriously concerned, tried the edge with his hand. John looked down: he felt as if the whole world was mad, and himself alone and powerless. When he raised his eyes again the terror had come nearer, for Lord Arundel was standing close by him and immediately confronting Kent and Nottingham.

"As for you two," he heard him say in weighty and restrained tones, "it had been meeter for you to be away than at this last act; for you never had anything but honour of me, and you have unkindly brought me to shame. But the time will come, and that shortly, when as many shall marvel at your misfortune as do now at my fall."

He turned away and knelt down before the block. The chaplain heard his last brief confession and gave him absolution; then, while they bound his eyes, John felt his own heart beating as though it would burst.

The axe rose and fell. "So perish traitors!" said the executioner as he raised the head.

Only one voice in all the vast crowd replied "Amen."

"Silence!" said Lord Kent sternly; and he knelt while the body was carried away.

XLVIII.

AFTER the stormy scene in Westminster Hall and that heartrending flash of the axe on Tower Hill, the air seemed to grow suddenly lighter, and John felt his peace of mind returning, his old hopes reviving, under the still radiance which began to spread over the king's new realm of England. For Richard was entering at last the clear meridian of his splendour: the clouds which so long obscured him had passed away or sunk below the horizon, and he was determined to make not only the present hour but the future all his own. Dazzled by his glory or humbled by his power, the kingdom over which he now rose consented to draw from him alone the form, the aims, the government, of its whole being: he on his part would change the historic landmarks of society, and by the mere touch of his all-powerful rays exalt the seeds and saplings of yesterday into the forest oaks of the age to come.

It was hardly a month since Gloucester's mysterious death, hardly more than a week after Arundel's fall, when in a single day this transformation passed over the feudal landscape of England. The Earls of Derby, Rutland, Kent, Huntingdon, and Nottingham vanished, and in their places in the royal sunlight shone the Dukes of

Hereford, Aumerle, Surrey, Exeter, and Norfolk ; while the Lords Despenser, Neville, Scrope, and Thomas Percy shot up into the Earls of Gloucester, Westmoreland, Wiltshire, and Worcester. Surprising as these changes were in a House of sixty peers, there was one which was even more bewildering. John Beaufort, the eldest natural son of Lancaster, had in the earlier part of the year been transmuted from base metal to silver by an Act of legitimation ; he had since then been parcel-gilt with a brand-new earldom, and was now, on this effulgent 29th of September, enriched still further by two marquessates,—that of Dorset, which he resigned after a few hours' enjoyment, and that of Somerset, which he never used at all. It is significant of the opulent confusion of the time that he was thenceforth always known, in spite of this exchange, as Marquess of Dorset,—the only one of his titles to which he had no longer any right.

Lavish as Richard was to all those who had stood by him at the critical moment, he was fully aware of the distinction between fair-weather allies and real friends. Hereford and Norfolk he watched with an unwearied patience and a hand always ready for a safe revenge : for De Vere, though now thrice buried, was never forgotten. The Hollands, his own kindred, on the other hand, he knew to be beyond suspicion—as the old Earl of Kent had told John, the mistletoe could never turn against the oak on which it grew. To Huntingdon, therefore, besides the Duke-

dom of Exeter, he gave a long roll of manors and the castle of Arundel, with its fabulous hoard of plate and tapestries. For Tom nothing was good enough: the rank of Duke, the historic name of Surrey, the most noble order of the Garter, Warwick Castle, and the famous Warwick stud, all these failed to express the real gratitude and affection of the king towards his eldest nephew. His next gift, though a purely decorative one, seemed to at least one observer to carry a deeper meaning than the rest. Richard had always cherished a singular devotion to the memory of Edward the Confessor, and had now gone to the length of adopting his traditional arms as part of the royal insignia. At the same time he granted them, as a unique prerogative, to the Duke of Surrey, whose banner thenceforward was to bear, instead of the modest baronial shield which was his birthright, the cross and martlets of the Confessor impaled with the lions of England. The slight bordures of ermine and silver which differenced the achievement could not disguise its likeness to the standard of the reigning dynasty, and John as he saw the two displayed for the first time side by side, was irresistibly reminded of Pavia and Gian Galeazzo's sinister hints. And certainly, whatever might be the king's private views on the succession, none took him very seriously when, a few months later, he named as his heir the little Earl of March, a friendless child of five.

Happily Tom seemed to have inherited none of his

father's unlawful ambitions. There was, however, one more honour in store for him which he was ready enough to accept—the great office of Earl Marshal. This had been granted in 1383 to Nottingham for life, and only a year ago Richard had confirmed it to him and his heirs. But no man can preside at his own trial; and within four months of his elevation to the rank of Duke, Norfolk found himself called to trial by one of his peers. Hereford, with the cat-like sagacity by which he lived through so many dangers, divined that Norfolk, in order to save himself, would sooner or later pluck up the courage to denounce his old associate to the king. Two could play at that game: the bolder one better than the half-hearted. When Parliament met after Christmas he lost no time in impeaching Norfolk for using treasonable language and trying to draw him into a conspiracy. The case was heard no less than three times, and afforded Richard all the pleasures of policy, revenge, and spectacular display. A Parliamentary Committee referred it to a Court of Chivalry, which in turn appointed a judicial combat to be fought before the king by the two Dukes in person. When September came, the lists were pitched at Coventry, the Court prepared for a pageant of unparalleled magnificence, and the ceremonial was committed to the hands of Thomas, Duke of Surrey, as Earl Marshal of England during the king's pleasure.

The splendour of that day lived long in the memory of all who saw it, and John, who knew

enough to follow the moves of the royal game, looked back to it afterwards as the realisation of many dreams, for not even in Italy had he seen upon a throne a more perfect example of power, subtlety, and magnificence combined. It was the subtlety which pleased him most. Richard had two obvious alternatives open to him: he could not, of course, leave the case to be decided by the chances of battle, but he could destroy either of the two men he hated by deciding to accept the evidence of the other. Many thought that he would crush Hereford, the more dangerous of the two; but this would have cost him the support of Lancaster. Others made sure that Norfolk would be the victim: no hearts would break for him, and his fall would lull Hereford into security till a better chance appeared. Of these alternatives, the first was urged upon the king by Salisbury, Despenser, and Scrope; the second by Exeter only: Surrey, as Earl Marshal and youngest Counsellor, was for letting the opponents fight to a finish. Richard alone saw that by an indecisive judgment he could rid himself of both. By exiling Norfolk for life he put him out of the English world as finally as if he had condemned him to death; by banishing Hereford for ten years he tore up his influence by the roots, and kept Lancaster quiet with hopes of leave to replant. Meanwhile it might be taken that Hereford's guilt was rather treachery against his peer than treason to his sovereign, and family relations would be undisturbed.

So the sky cleared once more, the sun shone brighter than ever, and deep peace settled down upon the palace at Eltham, where Richard, after the labours of diplomacy, spent the autumn playing with his little Queen. September drew to a close with warm still days, in which life seemed as richly coloured and composed, and almost as unmoving, as a series of pictures in tapestry, swayed only by the faintest sigh of the wind. At noon the gardens murmured with poetry; in the breathless evening they dreamed to the thin music of the lute; at all times they were haunted by the grace and beauty of girlhood. Perhaps the young Duke of Surrey and his bride found the air a little heavy and enervating after their Yorkshire moorland; but for John and Margaret this idle end of summer was a green oasis in the desert of deferred hopes.

Once only the sunlight of their enchanted garden was touched by a cloud—the lightest shadow of a cloud—from the outer world. It was a hot day, and they were sitting, two here and three there, in the long open galleries of the palace—very pleasant and shady galleries hung with vines. Outside the sound of a trumpet broke the repose of the morning with a startling challenge; a heavy step followed the patter of the young lord in waiting. Henry of Hereford was there, elaborately dutiful, minutely melancholy, to take leave of his king on his way into exile.

Richard was all simplicity and kindness: at part-

ing he gave his cousin letters commendatory to the King of France and the Princes of half Christendom. When Henry bade him farewell, Richard replied cheerily, "Six years will soon be gone," and even the wily Hereford was moved by this remission of nearly half his sentence.

He passed away into the afternoon glare, and the Court fell back on its couches under the cool shady vines. "Well, they are gone," said Richard, lazily content, "and you, Tom, are Earl Marshal for life."

"For whose life? For our cousin Henry's?" asked the little queen.

"No, my angel," replied Richard; "longer than that, I hope."

"How long then?" persisted her inquiring Majesty.

"For his own life," he answered, laughing and mimicking her childish accent, "—or for mine at any rate."

"But is that longer?" And then, when everyone laughed, she repeated earnestly: "But is it longer? But tell me, why is it longer?"

Richard was more and more amused. "Well, perhaps it is not longer," he said mischievously: and again a light laughter rippled the placid faces around him.

PART V.

S U N D O W N

XLIX.

RICHARD ruled as despotically as even John could wish ; the laws of England, as he said, were in his mouth and nowhere else ; but then he administered them with leniency. Gloucester and Arundel once removed, he pursued no man to death,—a policy in striking contrast with the long and cruel series of judicial murders perpetrated by his opponents of ten years ago. His forced loans and arbitrary fines earned him a good deal of unpopularity in the counties which suffered from them, but not a finger was raised against his decrees, and when his uncle Lancaster died in February 1399 there was not left in England even a voice to call them openly in question.

So far, then, the great plan had worked out successfully : the old spider would have been satisfied with the younger brood to whom he had been obliged to leave his half-spun web. But in six weeks more all was changed : by a single miscalculation—probably the most far-reaching ever made in the history of England—Richard brought to ruin the fine-woven fabric which had cost him these ten

years of patience and duplicity. If we pity him as one who paid dearly for a mistake, we must remember that the mistake was not an accidental one, but the natural offspring of a union of levity and brutality. It was in the New June that it was conceived.

The day was a rough one towards the middle of March, and the king had gone over from the Tower to spend the afternoon in the society of his brother Exeter. The Duchess was, as usual, away from home on some frivolous errand of her own, and it happened that Tom had taken this opportunity for coming to discuss with his uncle a matter over which they had already disagreed.

When Richard entered the great chamber of the house he found his brother sitting on a couch near the fire with a sullen shoulder turned upon his nephew, who stood near him with a roll of papers in his hand, and a secretary in close attendance. The Duke rose heavily to greet the king, and made no attempt to conceal his ill-humour. Richard, however, ignored it, and seated himself comfortably in the place from which his host had risen. "What have you there?" he asked Tom, who was in the act of handing his papers to the secretary.

"The Charter of Mount Grace—at least the draft of it."

"Mount Grace?" Richard's ear was pleased. "That's a fine name. What is Mount Grace?"

Exeter walked ostentatiously away to the window

and looked out. Tom seemed a little irritated by both his relatives.

"I am founding a Carthusian house in Yorkshire," he replied, "by royal licence, dated the 18th day of February, in the twenty-second year of our Lord Richard, whose memory God preserve."

"Thank you, He does," said the king, smiling affectionately at this outbreak; "but that was a year ago—your charter seems to be rather belated."

The young founder looked towards his uncle Exeter and frowned. "It is not so easy," he explained, "to get the wording of the deed settled."

"You have got two words right, at any rate," said Richard; "let me see if I can help you with the rest." He made a sign to the secretary to read the document, and lay back luxuriously upon his cushions to hear, inviting Tom to a seat beside him.

"*Sciant omnes*," began the secretary: the king's hand went up.

"English first, Latin afterwards: and you can omit the Duke of Surrey's titles and the usual pious generalities: come to the Carthusians."

"If your Majesty pleases," said the reader. "And whereas while we believe and know of a truth that all conditions and orders of Holy Church are good and devout——"

"My dear Tom," Richard interrupted, "you know of a truth more than I do: no wonder you use the royal 'we.'"

To John, where he stood near the door, the words seemed to awake an echo: but his lord explained with perfect simplicity that the plural was a mere form of the lawyers.

"Yet," continued the secretary,—“yet, by the inspiration of God, we bear a special devotion and strong affection towards the most holy Carthusian Order, and greatly admire the sacred observances peculiar to the said order, and also the persons living therein, whose number, by the aid of the divine grace, we heartily desire to increase——”

“Since they cannot multiply themselves!” said the king. “You certainly have ideas, Tom; you justify your claim to inspiration.”

“It is all quite true,” replied his nephew seriously. “I do specially admire them: they have more common-sense about them than the rest, and less sanctimoniousness. The Venerable Peter of Clugny has said that they are the best of all the Latin Orders.”

“Oh, has he?” asked Richard, who was thoroughly enjoying himself; “did he say it to you?”

The learned founder looked a little disconcerted. He has been dead this hundred years: it was Nicholas Love who repeated it to me.”

“Ah!” said the king. “Nicholas Love: there you come to a name I know. I hope you are doing something for Nicholas.”

“You will see.” He turned to the secretary. “Go on: read the *testatum*.”

“For these reasons and for the honour and reverence due to God, and His Holy Mother the Virgin Mary, and to St Nicholas, and for the affection we bear to the feast of the Assumption of the said glorious Virgin and the feast of the said St Nicholas——”

Richard laughed outright. “By St John!” he cried, “you know how to place your friends in good company. After that I suppose you make St Nicholas your first prior?”

“Not nominally the first: there are two fellows who have been overseeing the building, but they only have one year each: Nicholas follows next January. The Prior of the Grande Chartreuse has given his assent.”

“By the way,” asked Richard, “why this affection of yours for the feast of the Assumption?—or is that a lawyer’s form too?”

“I was married on that day.” He lowered his voice and looked again towards the window.

Richard understood and changed the subject. “Well, now, the list of founders and benefactors—I hope I come in that?”

“Certainly,” replied Tom, “and I wish all my family to be in it: that was the point we were at when you arrived.”

“The confraternity,” continued the secretary, “is to be called the House of Mount Grace of Ingleby, and the members are to pray for King Richard and Queen Isabella, for the said Thomas Duke of Surrey

and his wife, for John Duke of Exeter, and for John Ingleby and Eleanor his wife, during their lives ; and after their deaths to say masses for the repose of their souls, and also for the souls of Anne, late queen of the said King Richard ; of Edmund, late Earl of Kent, and Margaret his wife ; of Joan, late Princess of Wales, and her husband Thomas, late Earl of Kent, grandparents of the said Duke of Surrey ; of Thomas, late Earl of Kent, and Alice his wife, father and mother of the said duke ; and for the souls of all his ancestors and heirs for ever ; and also for the souls of Thomas Ingleby and Catherine his wife, and of certain other persons ; and for the souls of all the faithful dead."

When the dry mechanical voice ceased there was silence in the room. Richard's mood had changed completely from the moment when he heard the name of his dead Queen Anne, the anguish of whose memory still shook him like a returning fever after long intervals of time. He looked fixedly down and busied himself with a tassel of the cushion beside him, separating the threads and laying them carefully out on the palm of his hand : tears fell more than once upon them before he threw them from him and raised his head.

"Well," he said at last, looking with kind eyes on his nephew, "you have a long list there : I hope the contributions are proportionate, or you will be ruined."

"That's the trouble," said Tom ; "they are all

small people except my Uncle John, and he refuses to have any hand in the business. The builders are wanting money at this moment, and I haven't a penny for them: my expenses have been very heavy this year."

Richard smiled indulgently. "John!" he called to the sullen figure by the window. "Don't you think you might join: you are not asked to give something for nothing, you know."

"No clergy-mongering for me," growled his brother. "I'd rather buy one meal for my body than ten masses for my soul any day."

Richard smiled again: his lighter mood was returning. "Well, Tom," he said, "there's one uncle gone, and I'm afraid the other is in your own case—his expenses have been very heavy lately; the chest wants refilling first."

"You can fill it when you please," Exeter grumbled. "You have only to pluck that green goose Hereford."

Perhaps the idea was not quite new to the king's mind: he looked towards his nephew, and was silent. Tom took the matter quite simply. "The fact is," he said, "that you can't leave him where he stands: now his father is dead he holds more land than any six of us."

"True," replied Richard, "he is in a false position for a subject; but is it the moment to rouse him when we are just going to Ireland?"

"Rouse him!" snarled Exeter. "Pluck him, I

tell you, every feather; take his ugly gosling to Ireland with you, and say you'll wring his neck if the old bird so much as hisses."

Richard turned again to Tom. "Your uncle of Exeter is always John Holland; but there is something in what he says." To John Marland, standing back by the door, the king seemed almost to be conciliating his nephew, appealing to him to make up his mind for him in the desired direction.

Tom was not loth. "You can't have two stags to one herd: we have had too much of that already."

"We will consult the Parliamentary Council," said the king, rising; and no one in the room doubted what he meant.

L.

ON the 29th of May Richard sailed for Ireland. It was now more than two months since the confiscation of the huge Lancaster inheritance, and Hereford had shown no active sign of resentment; nevertheless the king deliberated carefully before leaving the country, and took all the precautions that his advisors could suggest. Of his six faithful Lords Appellant three accompanied him in person with their retainers: one, the Duke of Surrey, was

despatched in advance to rally the English of the Pale; and the remaining two, the Earl of Wiltshire and the Marquis of Dorset, were left to assist the old Duke of York, who was to administer the realm as the King's Lieutenant during his absence. The great bodyguard of two thousand Cheshire archers formed the solid nucleus of the expedition, and took in charge the Crown jewels, the regalia, and the royal treasure. Lastly, Richard kept at his side, as a living guarantee against his enemies, two young hostages—one the disinherited son of the late Duke of Gloucester, the other the heir of Hereford himself,—a boy of thirteen, already known as Harry of Monmouth.

Tom's task was no easy one, but he threw himself into the work with ardour and something more. His ability and power surprised John, who was still apt to think of him as a boy, and was perhaps not quite free from the common belief of those who serve the highly born, that capacity is a gift reserved exclusively for the middle ranks. But the office of the King's Lieutenant in Ireland was not one which could be delegated to subordinates; and it was thanks to Tom's own energy and organising force that the necessary preparations were completed by the 31st of May, when Richard landed at Waterford.

Six days later his headquarters were advanced to Kilkenny, and the campaign was begun. Art MacMurrough proved to be a master in the prac-

tice of guerilla war, and after a month of fruitless successes, costly pursuits, and incessant rearguard actions, the exhaustion of their supplies compelled the expedition to take the coast road to Dublin and refit for a fresh advance.

By the 10th of July all was once more ready, and Tom was priding himself on having effectually guarded against any further shortage of provisions. He had established a continuous service at short stages along the whole of the road between Dublin and Arklow, and during the last few days he had visited every post in person to see that nothing had been left undone. During the final stage of his return journey he was riding ahead of his men, with John at his side, when suddenly, after crossing the headland north of Kilkenny, they caught sight of a small ship which had just rounded the point to the east of Blackrock. She was tacking hard for Dublin, and they watched her with interest, for she was the first English vessel to arrive since they reached Dublin ten days ago, and if she came from England would bring them the first news they had received since their landing at Waterford.

"I cannot understand," said Tom, "why she is so late: but there is no mistake about her now,—I see the white ensign and the private pennant I arranged with Bagot."

"We shall know before long," replied John; "a few more of those long legs will take her in." And they rode rapidly on, round the bay.

John's expectation was a natural one, but it was never to be fulfilled: to this day no one knows by what strange tangle of accident or cunning Richard's communications were impeded so long at the very crisis of his fate.

Tom rode straight to the Castle, passed the gate without a word, and dismounted at the steps. At the same moment Salisbury came hastily out, calling to his squire.

"Thank God!" he cried fervently, as he saw Tom; "you'll take young Harry off my hands—he's lost, if Exeter gets hold of him."

His hurried manner and agitated voice struck John with a deadly sense of danger: he divined in a flash that what had happened was foredoomed, inevitable, far-reaching—life went black before his eyes.

"You haven't heard?" said Salisbury, stopped by Tom's astonished look; "Bagot has come from England: Hereford landed in the Humber a week ago and the North is up, Percies and all. I'm off this moment to raise Chester and North Wales: you are to follow—God knows where you'll get transport—Good-bye!"

John stood looking after him: his lord ran up the steps. "Come along, John," he cried from the doorway; "here's a real war at last!"

His gay voice rang in the sombre courtyard: the blood leaped again in John's heart as he followed him.

LI.

THE real war was not to come yet. Richard himself was as eager as his nephew, but no one can make war without an army, and the royal armies all melted like snow before the rising Sun of Lancaster. The king had scarcely landed at Milford Haven when York, who was marching to join him, was overtaken by Hereford in person; his men deserted, and he himself accepted Hereford's assurance that he had only come to get back his own. Two days later the invader summoned Bristol Castle. In it were Scrope, Earl of Wiltshire, Sir John Bushy, the Speaker, and Sir Thomas Green, a knight of Richard's household. The Governor, Sir Piers Courtenay, surrendered them on demand, and in an hour their heads had fallen; Henry could make law as easily as Richard, but he made it without mercy and without even the semblance of justice.

The defection of York and Courtenay was a terrible blow to the king's party: some among them shook visibly at the fate of Scrope and Bushy, against whom their enemies had laid no charge except that their mere existence was inconvenient to the usurper. Richard alone appeared to be unmoved. "We have borne worse than this," was his continual answer to his nephew's fierce chafing. He seemed to forecast another great

recovery, and to be resolved meanwhile to make the crisis a final winnowing of friends from time-serving followers. "Most men," he said, "are conqueror's men: their time comes afterwards. The fighting must be done by those who want us for our own sakes. I may have few such, but I am sure Henry has none."

Certainly Hereford could not count even among his own family circle any friends so devoted as Surrey and Exeter, or a single supporter so faithful and disinterested as Salisbury. These were Richard's sheet-anchors, and he never doubted that they would hold. While he and they lived nothing was lost beyond retrieving; the rest might fail him now, they would fail his enemy hereafter. He heard then with a serene contempt the news of the disloyalty of Worcester and Aumerle; a week after he left them they had disbanded their troops, and taken up what they called a neutral position. The axe play at Bristol had shattered their nerve: they were ready to beg life of the victor when it should please Fortune to name him.

In the meantime Salisbury had joined the king at Conway; but he brought no force with him, for Hereford had marched on Cheshire at once and held it down by sheer numbers. Before the middle of August the invader was firmly established at Chester, and Richard had but a hundred or two of lances to meet him. Time must be gained, and there was only one way to gain it.

On the 14th Surrey and Exeter came to Chester unarmed, and unattended except by squires and secretaries. Their errand was to parley, to procrastinate, to entangle Hereford in orderly negotiations. Their failure was immediate and complete. John knew it from the moment when the small nervously cheerful party was ushered into the usurper's presence with all the observance of royal ceremony. Exeter knew it too, and his coarse face turned a leaden purple. Tom's simplicity remained as the only diplomatic asset of the Embassy.

Henry of Hereford, or Lancaster as he had now the right to call himself, received them in a courtyard filled with picked troops displaying the colours of the most powerful barons in England. On his right hand stood the ex-Archbishop Arundel, on his left the Earls of Northumberland and Westmoreland, next to them the faithless Dorset and the young Earl of Stafford, Tom's own brother-in-law. John, five paces in rear of his master, could survey them all at once, and every face among them had its own associations for him. A hostile personality seemed to leap at him from each in turn as he passed them in review; but when he came to the central figure he saw the rest no longer except as shadows hovering faintly about their leader. Solid and sleek, in complete armour and a tall black silk hat, Henry stood to receive his guests, broad-browed, broad-shouldered, and unutterably hateful. Every moment, with the man's incessant smiling,

the wide cheeks widened and the short peaky beard came doubling forward. In sight of this coarse abundant vitality it was pain to think of Richard's hart-like eyes and slender figure—the grace of a deer beneath the murderous fist of a butcher.

The audience was short, and stifled with oily geniality. It was in vain that Surrey spoke again and again of the king's reasonableness, of his desire to hear Lancaster's claims—even Lancaster's wishes.

"To-morrow," replied Henry, with his everlasting smile.

"I understand, then," said Tom firmly, "that that matter is settled: you will give us an answer to-morrow."

Henry's face shone with unction. "I will give my Cousin Richard an answer to-morrow. My Lord Archbishop and my Lord of Northumberland will carry it."

Exeter started, but Tom received the blow with courage. "Then our embassy is done," he said.

"Certainly," Lancaster replied, "your embassy is done, and your visit begins from this moment. My Lord of Westmoreland will attend you during your stay."

Westmoreland bowed and raised his hand: thirty men in the Neville livery grounded their poleaxes in a ring about the prisoners. They were just in time: John's hand was on his dagger and his eyes were already deep in Lancaster's throat.

LII.

THE two Dukes and their servants were housed in a large chamber on the second floor of the keep: after setting a sufficient guard outside, Lord Westmoreland left them to themselves. Surrey stood for some time by a window and looked silently out: he was lost in thought and frowned continually, but with no appearance of anger or impatience. Exeter moved uneasily about, scowling and growling.

"What fools we were! What fools!" he kept muttering, with a blow of his heel at each repetition.

"By God! By God and all His bones—if I had had a dagger!" His dull face wore its most cruel look, and John felt the old disgust as he saw it, though it was but a moment ago that he himself had been seized with the same murderous thought.

Presently Tom's brow relaxed: he turned to his companions with the abrupt familiar manner of his boyhood—however young, he was now their only leader.

"Look here," he said,—"you too, John,—I've worked this out: I see the whole plan; I'll just show it you while we have the opportunity."

They all three sat down in the window: Tom glanced at the little group of servants gathered at the farther end of the long room, and began to speak in a quiet even voice.

"This was a fool's errand of ours," he said, "and I've been wondering why the king made us put our heads into the fox's mouth: I see it now. Things had to be worse before they could be better. You saw how cool he was: but he must have known Hereford would have us, and him too: therefore he must have felt that that didn't matter, or that that was the best that could happen. I think he is right: so long as he lives and we live, the tables can always be turned: the one thing to avoid is hot blood while we are in the weaker position. If we had struggled, they would have taken our heads: now they have got us under the pretence of a visit, Hereford will be ashamed to go to extremes: he'll fine or banish us: we shall take it humbly and wait for our chance. We have quite half England with us: but just now it is not the half which is in the field."

Exeter looked a little more cheerful. "You think Hereford won't . . . you think he won't do more than fine us?" he asked.

Tom shrugged his shoulders. "My dear uncle," he replied, "what is the use of suggesting that? Of course if he does go to extremes, the game is ended—there's no more to be said. The other alternative is the only one that matters to us."

"You talk very lightly," said Exeter, with a peevish twist of his mouth.

John saw by his lord's face that an interruption would be not unwelcome.

"But what about the king?" he asked.

"He is safe enough," Tom replied. "He will abdicate. It is Hereford's game to make him do that: no one will rise in favour of a king who abdicates. On the other hand, it is also the king's game, because his turn must come, some day, if we live. We shall remove Henry—permanently—and no one can rise in favour of a usurper who has been removed permanently."

The phrase, though spoken with Tom's usual straightforward simplicity, did not please John's ear. It was an echo of Gian Galeazzo, whom he admired, but it seemed somehow less brilliant on English lips. Still Hereford was undeniably as much of a traitor as Gloucester or Arundel had ever been—more, for he had done what they had only plotted.

"When you say 'removed'——" John began.

"Oh! I would rather he showed sport," said Tom, "but we can't give much play to feelings of that kind: he's vermin, you know, not a right stag at all."

Exeter's eyes were fixed sullenly on the dagger in John's belt.

LIII.

IN the hands of Northumberland, a violent and self-seeking adventurer, the negotiations were much curtailed. On the 19th Richard came to Flint with the last few friends who remained to him. There were but four of them—the Earls of Salisbury and Gloucester, Bishop Merke of Carlisle, and John Maudelyn, the king's private secretary.

Hereford had kept his own counsel, and up to the moment of their arrival no one had any idea of the terms upon which they came. The place was surrounded by a huge army, but there were no troops in the courtyard where Richard was waiting. When Henry arrived, Westmoreland, Stafford, and the rest were near him as before, but they drew instinctively to one side of the entrance to the keep, so as to stand apart from Surrey and Exeter, who had been brought, rather to their own surprise, to be present at the meeting.

The arrangements were all such as would have been appropriate to the entertainment of one monarch by another. Henry himself was as smiling, as unctuously crafty, as ever. He advanced to meet the king, bowed twice, and addressed him by his title, but did not in any other way acknowledge the least inferiority of rank. Richard, on the other hand, behaved with a dignity so perfect that he

seemed almost to be unconscious of any change in his own position or Hereford's since they last parted. Beside so exquisite a piece of acting the cunning of his enemy showed vulgar and laborious.

To the spectators the scene was one of absorbing interest, for its exact meaning was still in doubt, and upon that meaning hung the life and fortune of every one of them. The hostile parties drew farther away from each other, to right and left of the great stone doorway, and conversed by signs and monosyllables while they watched their two leaders pacing slowly up and down the long courtyard together, and talking with the calm voices and polite gestures of men engaged in friendly negotiation. Henry's partisans appeared to be the more anxious: they had no bond with their chief, and no hold over him, except the bare material self-interests on each side. His intentions had never been confided to them; and though they had no reason to doubt the issue, it was still vague, and their stake was too great for indifference. But Richard's friends had already faced their utmost risk and looked beyond it. They could bear everything; for they had seen a possible hope in the distance, and their only present anxiety was to know that their forecast had not been baseless from the beginning. Exeter alone was really tortured by the suspense.

At one moment the discussion seemed to have reached a point of agreement, and hearts beat more quickly as the two royal negotiators came towards

the double knot of onlookers with the evident intention of speaking. But the alarm was a false one. Henry had nothing yet for publication. "His majesty will dine with us," he said to Westmoreland. "Let them lay for twelve at once." And he turned to resume his walk to and fro.

Richard was a pace or two in advance: he had moved back while Henry was speaking, and his eyes were fixed on the gateway, at the far end of the court, by which he had entered. The portcullis was down, and through it could be seen a dog, leaping against the crossed bars and thrusting his nose between them.

"Mat, Mat," Richard called to him. "Poor dog!"

"Let the dog in," Henry commanded. The portcullis began to rise slowly; there was a scramble of paws beneath it, and the king's favourite greyhound dashed into the courtyard. He came swiftly to the two figures in the centre, and leaped up with every sign of joy upon one of them: but that one was not his master.

Richard made no remark: the pacing began again, and Mat walked by Henry's side. As the turn was reached, close to the keep, the king hung back for an instant and then took his place, as if by accident, between Henry and the dog. But Mat, with the air of one who rebuffs a stranger, immediately passed behind him and was at Henry's side once more, thrusting his nose into the usurper's hand.

At the cold touch Henry stopped involuntarily. "What does the dog want?" he asked.

"Favour," replied the king with a bitter-sweet smile; "it is a good sign for you and an evil one for me."

"How do you know that?" asked Henry, rather taken by surprise.

"I know it well," said Richard, turning and speaking so that everyone could hear him. "The dog knows nothing of persons: he makes cheer to you as king of England: and so you will be; he has this knowledge by instinct. Take him: he is no worse than others."

They went in to dinner: when the whole party were seated there was one place vacant.

"Who is the twelfth?" asked Henry, looking round him. "Is there no one else coming?"

This time Richard laughed almost gaily as he seized his chance. "I suppose there were too many qualified for the twelfth place," he said; "they could not all come."

Soon after dinner horses were brought. Richard had been carefully kept from any private conversation with his friends, and he foresaw that he would not be allowed to travel with them. Before mounting, therefore, he turned to Surrey, "Good-bye, Tom," he said in his most natural voice. "You will find a good lord in my cousin Henry, but remember that it was I who made you a knight."

John heard the words and his heart leapt; to

those who had been present at the burial of De Vere, but to them only, the meaning was unmistakable; Richard was appealing once more to St George.

Conqueror and captive rode from the courtyard: the portcullis fell again behind them, and Richard's friends looked at one another. Westmoreland came back alone to them from the gate.

"My lords," he said, "my orders are to wait till the Londoners have struck their camp and then to see you clear. The king made it a condition that you should all six have a safe-conduct."

Exeter drew a deep breath and blew out his purple cheeks: John, with a quick side-glance, caught a very different gleam on his lord's face as they went silently into the keep.

LIV.

ON the 29th of September—two years to a day since the inauguration of his splendid despotism—Richard abdicated the Crown of England: on the 30th he was formally deposed by Parliament, and Henry of Lancaster, standing before the empty throne, challenged the realm by right of conquest and of descent. The first of these claims was undeniable, though frankly brutal: it was characteristic of the man

that he could not refrain from adding the second, based as it was upon a silly and scandalous tale which had failed, some ten days before, to commend itself even to his obsequious advisers. But Richard once gone, the only alternative to Lancaster was the eight-year-old Earl of March; and the two Houses had no hesitation in covering the shame of Henry's pleas with a decent Parliamentary title.

The coronation took place on the 12th of October. On the 18th began an inquiry into the circumstances of the Duke of Gloucester's death. Sir William Bagot turned usurper's evidence, and gave a voluble account which embarrassed friends and foes alike: he ended by casting suspicion on Surrey, Exeter, and Aumerle. Surrey shot up like a flame and challenged his accuser to trial by battle. The other two followed his example. The debate which followed made it clear enough that the two Hollands were wrongly accused; but Aumerle was again attacked next day, Lord FitzWalter and a dozen other peers throwing their hoods down before him on the floor of the House, as gages of their readiness to meet him in judicial combat. The scene ended with the examination of John Hall, a servant who swore to Aumerle's guilt and his own, and was thereupon taken to the gallows the same afternoon. On the Earl of Northumberland's motion it was then ordered that Richard should be conveyed to a place of surety and cut off from all intercourse with his friends. Five days later he was accordingly taken from the

Tower by night and in disguise, and brought by roundabout ways to Pontefract Castle in Yorkshire.

On the 29th the Lords Appellant were impeached. Their enemies were literally clamouring for blood, and as the trial degenerated into a mere howl of insensate party rage, even Surrey and Salisbury began to despair of themselves and the cause they served. Richard's fate depended on their life and liberty: if a charge of treason could be successfully laid, if it could be shown that they had acted for a moment on their own responsibility, and so been technically in disobedience to the king, both they and he were lost for ever. There was nothing for it but to cower: a horrible extremity for two of the most honourable and high-spirited men of their time. But the sacrifice of their self-respect was not made in vain: as they reiterated, hour after hour, their humiliating plea of agency, of irresponsibility, of action under the king's peremptory command, and were answered, hour after hour, by yells of disappointed fury, even Henry shrank from the sight of the evil passions which had given life to his dynasty. He foresaw, too, that his own popularity, his own security, would be endangered if he could not check the savagery of men like Northumberland, who served him only for plunder and revenge, and would serve his enemies to-morrow if a better price were offered. He therefore closed the proceedings with some show of order and decency, and postponed judgment till the 3rd of November.

In the few days which intervened, his more vindictive partisans exhausted every argument to secure a sentence of attainder and death ; but they found Henry quite unsympathetic to their ferocity. His distinction, and the secret of his success, lay in his entire lack of either depth or nobility of feeling : it was this which made him at once crafty and smiling, callous and genial ; which enabled him to bide his time without impatience, and take the supreme risk without hesitation ; to turn relentlessly against old friends, or to forgive his enemies when policy demanded it. The man who, to conciliate the Arundels, introduced into England the burning of heretics, was the same who, to avoid a lasting blood feud with the houses of York, Holland, and Montagu, could renounce the temptation to destroy all their chiefs at a single blow.

His decision was privately conveyed to the prisoners and their friends overnight. The Duchess of Exeter was at Dartington with her two young sons ; but Joan was with her brother, Lord Stafford, and received the king's message at his house. After a hasty consultation with John Marland, she requested that the two Dukes and their friends, after judgment had been pronounced, should all be brought back from Westminster by the king's bodyguard, and delivered out of custody at the gates of the New June, where the long river frontage gave them a more defensible position than Tom's own house in Friday Street.

This precaution was the saving of their lives. The mob of Londoners, who had always favoured Arundel and fiercely resented his death, waited on Tower Hill from long before daybreak, sure at last of their revenge. When the prisoners and their escort were seen to have stopped short in Thames Street, and the report spread that they had escaped with life and liberty, the rage of the crowd came roaring down the Hill like a breaker on a lee shore. Happily the troops were still in Thames Street, and remained there perforce, blocking the narrow entrance completely, until the fury of the storm ebbed gradually away, and only a few scowling ragamuffins remained to jeer through the great gates at the poleaxe men on guard behind them.

LV.

ONCE inside, Tom left his uncle to do the honours of the house, and took the stairs flying. At the top his wife was waiting for him. "Not very dignified, am I?" he said, throwing his arms about her,—“but then I'm not Earl Marshal any longer: I'm not even Duke of Surrey.”

“What is that to me?” she asked, as she drew down his head and kissed him once more.

“If you must know,” he replied gaily, “it is a

good deal to you : you are only a poor little Countess now, and you've lost Warwick and the horses too."

"I have not lost you." She took him by the hand and led him into the Great Chamber, where they were presently joined by the others. Joan gave them all a cordial welcome, but no one said much in reply.

John closed the door with encouraging sharpness, fixed his heel carefully against it, and looked on intently ; but the embarrassed and weary men before him showed no sign of appreciating their security.

"Come," said Tom briskly, "we must have a table ; we can't have a council of war without a council table—it is unheard of."

John brought a small table and placed it opposite the fire.

"But is this a council of war?" asked Aumerle in a low voice as they took their seats.

"Certainly it is," replied Tom. His tone was so decided that Aumerle started as if at a rebuke, and an uncomfortable silence followed.

"Where is Lord Dorset?" asked Joan, by way of making a fresh start.

"There is no longer a Lord Dorset." Tom's voice had scarcely recovered its cheerfulness ; his wife misunderstood the words, and her face clouded.

"No, no!" cried Tom ; "but he is Earl of Somerset now, and he has gone over to the enemy." He turned to his companions. "My wife does not quite understand the position yet. Let me sum it up,

and we shall see exactly how we stand. In the first place," he went on, with a bright look towards Joan, "since you last saw us we have all lost a good deal of weight—in fact, we have shrunk to what we were two years ago. My uncle is Huntingdon again, and I am Kent,—it feels rather like putting on our own cast-off clothes. Aumerle is Rutland, and Despensers here has to drop his earldom. Salisbury is Salisbury still, because he never became anything else,—that shows how much better it is never to accept promotion: you run no risk of having to forget your own name."

Salisbury laughed and nodded; but he was the only one of the party with a spark of humour left in him. Huntingdon growled at his nephew's light-hearted tone. "If it were only my name!"

"It is not only our names," Tom continued, still speaking to his wife; "we are all to lose whatever lands, charters, or money we have received since '97. I don't know who is to get them, but it really doesn't matter, the whole thing is just a pastime—something to occupy the other side during the inter-regnum."

"I don't know what you mean by that," said Rutland with an uneasy look at Joan; "you seem to have forgotten the sentence—the condition about——"

"Oh yes, I know," Tom interrupted; "about not adhering to the late King Richard, and being liable to the usual penalties for high treason, and so on.

Well, we do adhere to the late King Richard, don't we? and we *are* liable to the usual penalties, and we ought to be thankful for it."

☛ "I don't see that," Huntingdon grumbled. "What have I got to be thankful for?"

"My dear uncle," replied Tom, "isn't it better to be liable to penalties than to pay them? Henry has struck us with a blunt weapon: we shall strike him with a sharp one when our turn comes."

Rutland was looking pale and unhappy. "When our turn comes?" he mumbled. "That will be long enough."

"It will be at the earliest possible opportunity," replied Kent; "that is, the first time Henry gives a tournament."

"Why a tournament?"

"Well, any kind of festivity that will serve as an excuse for our coming near him armed and all together."

Rutland's furtive eye glanced again towards Joan. She saw that he mistrusted her, and rose to go, with the haughty little air that became her best.

"My husband is my lord," she said, "and King Richard is his; your secrets are as safe with me as with yourselves."

She had meant to leave them to their own counsel, but Rutland seized the opportunity to break off the discussion: the suspense of the last few days, the judgment pronounced that morning, and the outburst

of the mob, had shaken his nerves, and he winced from even the thought of further risk.

“Very well,” said Kent, as they all rose together, “then we must meet again; shall we say in three days’ time, and in this house? We can all come and go as we like here, because we have the river.”

It was by river that they now departed; Lord Huntingdon conveyed Rutland, Salisbury, and Despensers to the boat, and John found himself alone in the room with his master and mistress.

They had forgotten him: Joan’s head was hidden against her husband’s shoulder, and she was weeping silently.

“Never fear, sweetheart,” said Tom; “a few months at most, and we’ll make the New June blossom again like the rose.”

The words sounded to John like an ill omen: they did not seem to cheer his lady much.

“Must you?” he heard her saying, “must it all begin again? Have we not enough?”

Tom held her fast and looked down with a smile of indulgent tenderness. “Enough?—while Richard has nothing?”

The words swept like a sea-wind through every corner of John’s brain: he straightened himself proudly, as if to the flapping of a standard overhead.

LVI.

THE company of those who remained faithful to Richard was now reduced to the smallest possible number, but it was still powerful, and it soon began to grow. At the meeting on the 6th of November there were present three additional members, the Bishop of Carlisle, the Abbot of Westminster, and Ralph, Lord Lumley; these were joined within the month by Sir Thomas Blount, Sir John Shelley, Sir Barnard Brocas, and others. No one suspected the design of the four Earls; there was even a slight revulsion of feeling in their favour, and Henry seemed to be playing into their hands when in December he announced his intention of keeping Christmas at Windsor and ending the festivities with a Twelfth-night tournament.

The loyalists at once held a final council, at which Lord Kent proposed that the whole party should meet two days beforehand at Kingston-on-Thames and ride together to Windsor as if arriving for the tournament. Confederates could be found to admit them to the Castle during the night: then, when once they had made sure of Henry and his son, they would proclaim Richard, send messengers to France, and raise the country in every direction.

The plan seemed full of promise to every one but

Rutland, who was still in a pitifully depressed state. He agreed, however, to stand in with the rest; and the meeting broke up with the understanding that the members were to assemble at dusk on January 4 without further summons, and in the meantime to give no sign of activity, even to each other.

Tom went straight to inform his wife, who was waiting in Lady Huntingdon's room, and John sat in the corridor outside. Presently the door opened, and Margaret Ingleby came out.

John sprang up to greet her, but she seemed hardly to remember who he was. Her hand lay in both his while she spoke to him, without resistance, but without any touch of recognition.

"I have heard your plot," she began. "I have nothing to say about that, but you have forgotten the only thing I care about."

"Tell me," he said with a quickening of anxiety.

"Lord Stafford will be there—with the king."

John was thunderstruck: he had indeed forgotten. But she was right. Lord Stafford was a prime favourite with Henry: he had married the heiress of the murdered Gloucester; he was to have the next vacant Garter Stall; he was the most rising young man at Court. Certainly he would be at Windsor, and if the plot succeeded he could not fail to be among those marked for death.

But here a sudden rage came over John as he realised the two-edged horror of the position. What

was one life that it should weigh against so many—against King Richard's own?

"What can we do?" he asked in low fierce tones. "Would you destroy us all?"

"I would destroy myself."

"Yourself!" he groaned, more exasperated still. "How could you save him if my lord cannot? You know John Holland and the rest too—there'll be no one for mercy this time."

He would have tossed her hand away, but her clasp tightened firmly upon him. "He must, be warned," she said; "he must, and since none of you can do it, I will."

Her deep musical voice had its old power over him. His anger passed, and he saw her as she was, daring everything for a mistress whose own loyalty could ask nothing, even for the brother she loved. But his face was sterner than ever, for the danger grew more terrible as he looked upon it.

"Margaret," he said, "do what you will with *me*. I gave gladly, and I'll not repent; but I cannot give you Richard."

"Richard is mine as well as yours; if he goes I lose you all."

His eyes thanked her, but he shook his head. "I promise you," he pleaded, "that I will defend Stafford with my life. Surely that is enough. They will think twice before they part with me."

"No," she answered, "it is not enough. You have said yourself that I know John Holland."

"You have my promise," he said stubbornly; "you cannot ask more."

She pressed his hand, and walked slowly away. He looked after her without moving.

LVII.

THE 4th of January had come. By sunset the Earls of Kent and Huntingdon were at Kingston; by six o'clock, when darkness fell on the short winter's day, 400 lances had assembled, and other troops were reported on the march. Of the chiefs, only one was absent from the rendezvous. If it had been any other than Rutland, his failure might have caused alarm; but the party was strong enough to spare its weakest member, and no one suspected him of courage enough to betray the plot.

By half-past six the moon was rising: she was only a day or two past the full, and as the clear frosty light broadened up the sky impatience began to grow on the conspirators. Mounted messengers had been sent out to look for signs of Rutland's approach. Shortly before eight they returned without tidings, and Lord Kent gave the word to start without him.

By eleven the head of the column had reached Frogmore, and Lord Kent halted to enable the rear-

guard to come up. Three-quarters of an hour later John stood under the shadow of the castle, and rapped out the signal upon the secret gate.

It was opened immediately. John passed the word back to those who followed, stepped inside, and went forward a pace or two.

The porter hung about him : the man seemed uneasy, but quite devoid of caution. "I beg your pardon, sir," he said, touching his cap, "but if you want to see the king, I'm afraid you're too late. I hope I shan't lose my bargain, sir."

"Where is the king?" asked John sharply.

"He went to London, sir, this evening early."

John's head was whirling. He looked round at the crowd of armed men pouring into the courtyard, and saw his lord among them.

"The king is gone," he said in a low voice; "the porter says he is gone to London."

"Oh, is he?" replied Kent coolly; "we'll see about that."

He ordered the porter into custody, drew up his men in four companies, and gave directions for the whole castle to be seized and searched in detail.

No opposition was offered: but neither king nor courtiers were found. The chiefs stood in the moonlight looking at one another with eyes that recognised defeat, but refused to acknowledge it.

"Try the canons' houses," said Lord Kent, "and you, John, look into the Great Gateway."

His men dashed off in front of him. Before he

could reach the gateway tower they were dragging out a prisoner. But it was not the king: it was Margaret Ingleby.

"I came to see a friend," she said, "but I was too late; the Duke of York was here already."

John saw that he must clear her before the men, and that quickly.

"My lord!" he shouted across the moonlit green, "Lord Rutland has betrayed us, the king has gone to London."

"Right!" shouted Tom in reply; "then we are for London too. Fall in!"

LVIII.

THE real war had come at last, and Tom was in his element. He marched eastward with a dash which put heart into his men; halted them at Colnbrook to avoid fatigue, and made a great parade of taking up a strategic position there, where the roads branched off to Windsor and Maidenhead. His right flank could be turned by Horton, and he knew it; but he had no real object in covering Windsor, for if he were compelled to fall back at all, it must be towards Maidenhead and Oxford, keeping open the direct route to Wales, the last possible rallying-ground of Richard's cause.

In the meantime scouts were sent out towards London, and messengers to the rear, to hurry on the promised reinforcements, some small bodies of which were already reported close at hand.

After six hours' rest and a plentiful dinner every one appeared to be in good spirits. John tried in vain to catch his lord off guard for a moment and learn his true estimate of their chances. He ended by adopting his working hypothesis that all was going well.

At noon Margaret came to say good-bye to him. She was to return to Lady Kent at Kingston, and take her straight to Chester; from there it would be easy for them to rejoin Lord Kent, or escape to France by sea, as the occasion required.

These alternatives were spoken of with matter-of-fact hardness on both sides. Margaret whatever she felt, could not afford to spend her strength immediately before her journey. John was fettered by a masculine shame: while there is still the remotest chance of survival, a man, and especially an Englishman, dare not risk his self-respect in the naked farewell words of the long parting. Even to himself his heart said nothing unendurable, as he watched her take the road and listened to the rattle of hoofs dying away between the frosted hedgerows.

He returned to find the chiefs in council. Scouts had brought in a man of Rutland's: whether he came on his own account or his master's, no one

but Lord Kent ever knew; but he brought heavy news. London had risen with enthusiasm, and Henry was marching with no less than sixteen thousand men.

“I put six for sixteen,” said Tom as he informed his colleagues; “but six are enough to move us from here. We must find something we can really hold against odds, till our friends come in.”

They drew off to Maidenhead at once and barricaded the bridge. The town afforded excellent quarters, while the advance-guard of Henry’s force, arriving at dusk, had to shiver through the frosty night on the eastern bank of the river. John counted their watch-fires, and saw that new ones were continually being added: there was little doubt that the attack would begin at daybreak.

LIX.

AN hour before dawn Lord Despenser and Sir Thomas Blount moved quietly off in the direction of Henley with the baggage train and all the unmounted troops. John perceived that a general retreat had begun, and that the coming fight was to be merely a rear-guard action; but what were the chances of success he could not tell. He stood with his lord at the door of their lodging, and

watched in the growing light while the ammunition waggons were brought forward again into position within a quarter-mile of the river bank.

"John," said Lord Kent in a quiet unemphatic voice, "if any one remarks on my uncle's absence, you can say that he went last night to Berkhamstead to bring up reinforcements."

John started as if he had been struck.

"You see the plan," said his lord almost sternly. "If he finds himself in sufficient force, he comes down on Henry's rear: if not, he makes for Marlow and goes west with the others."

"I see," replied John, looking him straight in the face; "was the plan yours or his?"

"The ammunition is all forward now, I think," said his lord; "it is time we were following."

Trumpets were sounding on both sides as they came within sight of the bridge. A group of officers clustered round Lord Kent immediately.

"I see you have all found your places," he said cheerfully, "archers to right and left—they will take open order at once: keep the shooting under control as far as possible, and see that the waggoners feed the fighting line with arrows. The men-at-arms will remain in column on the road, and take their orders from my trumpet: they will charge in troops of forty each—ten abreast."

The enemy were not so methodical: they were commanded by Sir Robert Neville, a gallant but inexperienced young man, who wished to make a

reputation before his superiors could overtake him with the main army. Being comparatively weak in archers, he was compelled to force the fighting: his billmen to the number of over a thousand were drawn up in a crescent, ready to converge upon the bridge-head, with a reserve of equal numbers behind them; and in front of both his wings a thin line of bows was thrown forward to divert the attention of Lord Kent's marksmen from the point of attack.

This, however, they were unable to do. The barricades upon the bridge were very slight—they were rather obstacles than barriers,—but the roadway was flat, and the low parapets gave little or no cover. Salisbury's archers had the range exactly, and the assailants had barely time to tear down the first breastwork of hurdles and rush into the narrow passage, before the head of their column was completely snowed under. For a moment or two John saw the converging pressure from behind force more and more men forward to fall writhing and shouting over those who had already fallen in front: then almost before he realised what was happening, the bugle-horns sounded sharply to right and left, and the arrow-sleet was suddenly over. The enemy were scattering out of range. Lord Kent's loss was very slight; his archers had been strong enough to dominate the enemy's, as well as to destroy the advance, and he cheerfully consented to an hour's truce for the removal of the wounded,

upon condition that the two remaining barriers should not be touched.

Before this work was finished the sun rose in great splendour: John saw the first clear ray flash on his lord's helm and fire the golden lions on his surcoat, as he rode across the front to speak to Salisbury. The men saw it too, and raised a cheer.

Tom came back smiling. "Salisbury's fellows wish this could last for ever," he said to John, "but it can't."

John felt a strange elation gaining on him.

"It has lasted too long for those poor fellows yonder." He pointed to the slow march of the dead and wounded opposite.

"Not a bit," replied Tom, still radiant; "it is a good day to die on, this—wait and see."

The light on his face shone full into John's mind, and cleared up his doubt. They were lost: his lord knew it. A moment afterwards he realised that his anxieties too had all vanished: he was happy, like his two radiant chiefs, with a careless happiness that he had never known before.

The trumpets were sounding again. Neville had put his fresh troops in the front line and was repeating his desperate attack. This time the second barrier went down, but again the tide of the advance was choked by its own dead.

"We must rebuild," John began to suggest to the man beside him. But as he spoke he saw the enemy in their retreat throwing the broken hurdles

down into the river. He looked round at his lord.

"Never mind," said Tom, "it is not over yet."

He rode forward to receive the flag of truce himself.

"Listen," he said to the herald. "Take my compliments to Sir Robert Neville, and say that I wish he would give me the pleasure of meeting him in person on the usual terms. His next attack will finish the affair one way or the other, and the opportunity will have gone by. Say that I propose to be on the bridge ten minutes after hearing his trumpet, with one squire only, no one else to be within a furlong on either side."

This offer seemed as reasonable and attractive to Sir Robert as to the challenger himself: it in no way conflicted with his ideas on the duty of a commander. Some little time was taken up in arranging for the further conduct of the action in the event of his being disabled; but at last his trumpet rang out, and Lord Kent called for his helmet.

"Remember St Inglebert," said John before he buckled it on, "go in at your fastest pace and come sharply forward as you cope."

"I wish Edmund were here," returned his lord; "ask him to forgive me for sending him off to France."

The last barrier was opened, and the champions sat motionless on their horses in full sight of both

armies. Bills and bows were forgotten, and the two lines pressed forward, even within the forbidden distance of each other.

When the *laissez-aller* sounded, Neville started at once. Kent hung back for a moment, and then launched himself like an arrow. At the instant before meeting his opponent he bent forward suddenly, as he had seen Reynault de Roye do ten years ago, his spear and shoulder in one piece. Upon him the shock seemed hardly to take effect at all; to his opponent it was fatal. Sir Robert was flung against the parapet of the bridge, and was taken up with his neck broken.

Broken, too, was the spirit of the attacking army: they made but a feeble reply to the triumphant cheering of their adversaries, and soon afterwards were seen to be busy about dinner: they had not even asked for a truce. Their inaction lasted until sunset, when some of Northumberland's troops arrived, and a third assault was ordered.

This time the column was headed by a hundred men-at-arms, who marched slowly on foot to the entrance of the bridge and were then thrust forward, like a steel spear-head, by the rush of unarmoured troops behind them. The arrows clashed upon their plates like hail on glass, and many fell: but the rest succeeded in breaking the last barrier and staggering forward a few paces on to the open ground. Then a trumpet sounded three times in rapid succession, and three troops of mounted men

in heavy armour fell upon them like three great oaks falling among underwood : behind them in the twilight the storm of arrows, more terrible now because unseen, choked the bridge once more with dying and dead.

There were fresh men and desperate men in this attack : but it failed at last, and Lord Kent dictated his own terms for the night. The prisoners he returned, with a hand-shake and a light word of good-bye to each : even Stutterville, thought John, was never in a happier or more charming mood.

LX.

THE rear-guard action was over, and Lord Kent, in spite of the risk involved in his chivalrous challenge, had successfully achieved his object. He had secured for Despenser's men a clear start of twenty-four hours, and had now only to disengage himself and follow with the mounted troops. This proved easy, in spite of the stillness of the night and the broad moonlight which lasted till morning. The town formed an effectual screen for the movement : the waggons were abandoned where they stood, the armour and ammunition was all placed upon pack-horses, and by five o'clock the last of

the little army slipped off unperceived by the enemy, leaving behind them only a score of wounded men hidden in cottages, and a few lights burning on their last barricade.

It was still twilight when they came to Henley : there they tore down the stone parapet of the bridge at both ends, and piled the broken masonry in the centre. Two hours later they did the same at Wallingford : the archers grumbled aloud as they turned away from a breastwork which, as they said, they could have held against St Michael and all the angels.

At Abingdon they dined and rested : Despenser had slept there the night before, but had left again very early, and was now some ten or eleven hours in advance. The sun set before they reached Faringdon, and it was pitch-dark when they rode into Fairford, for the moon was not yet up. She rose at ten o'clock and lighted them to Cirencester, where they were to meet Despenser. He had, however, marched through the town and left a message that he was encamped in a park on the far side : Lord Kent accordingly sent on his men to join forces, and fixed his own headquarters at the principal inn, looking out upon the market-place. Salisbury and Lumley remained with him, attended only by a chaplain and secretary and two squires, as well as John Marland : even for these the house could hardly provide room. But after such a day's work they had no difficulty in sleeping soundly.

The moon was far down the sky, but it was not yet day, when John was awakened by a loud knocking upon the street door. Through the iron window bars of the ground-floor room, which he was sharing with the other two body-squires, he saw a group of pole-axemen, two of whom were carrying enormous horn lanterns.

"What do you want? Who are you?" he asked.

"I am the bailiff of this town," answered a voice in the shadow of the house, "and I demand admittance in the king's name."

"Be good enough," replied John, "to demand it again in a couple of hours' time."

"That is a servant's answer," retorted the voice. "Where are your masters?"

"I am here," said Lord Kent, who had come downstairs on hearing the noise, followed immediately by Lords Salisbury and Lumley.

A lantern was held up, and a face peered into the room.

"Thomas, Earl of Kent, John, Earl of Salisbury, and Ralph, Lord Lumley, I summon you to surrender as rebels and traitors to our Lord King Henry."

Lord Lumley had been eyeing the pole-axemen. They were neither young nor smart-looking: there was something humorous about so pompous a demand so insufficiently backed.

"Arrested by the watch!" he cried; "and fined, I daresay!"

"Steady!" said Salisbury in a low tone; "this may be serious."

Kent thought so too. "Perhaps you will be content to wait while we finish dressing?" he said courteously.

The bailiff agreed, and his men fell back a few paces. The three lords went upstairs to consult, and took John with them.

"In the open," said Kent, "these fellows would give us no trouble. There are only ten of them, and we are eight—seven with sword and dagger. But we must know where we are going if we make a rush for it. They will have shut the town gates."

"We can't hold the house, I suppose," suggested Salisbury, "till Despenser comes?"

Kent shook his head. "It's a mere cockle-shell, and we don't know how long he may be. I fixed no hour, and he may have to break in."

They looked out into the wide street, where daylight was beginning to appear at last.

"There's the church," said Salisbury, pointing across the market-place to a large building with scaffolding upon it. "It looks new. I hope it is consecrated," he added with a smile.

"I hope it is defensible," Lumley replied, laughing.

"I daresay it will serve our turn one way or the other," said Kent. "Let us go down and see this bailiff."

They took their swords and went down.

"I understand, sir," said Lord Kent through the window, "that you regard us as your prisoners? I offer ransom."

"I am a gentleman, my lord," replied the bailiff curtly.

"The more reason," urged Lord Kent; "a gentleman always puts his prisoner to ransom."

"The cases are different: I have not taken you in fight."

"Good!" said Lord Kent. "We can put that right at once. Have you a sword and dagger?"

"I decline the honour," replied the other with a cold patience.

Lumley was annoyed. "Why did you call yourself a gentleman, then?" he asked.

"I bear coat armour."

"I should think so!" cried Lumley: "a demilion faineant!"

Salisbury gave a half-groaning laugh. "There's an end of that," he said; "it is time to go now."

They filed deliberately out into the passage. John unbarred the door with one quick movement, and the seven swordsmen went through the watch without a single effective blow on either side. The bailiff alone followed them with sword drawn, shouting angrily to his men to come on. The poleaxes were unused to charging, except with the butt.

At the church porch there was a moment's pause: the door proved to be unlocked, and the fugitives

slipped through it one by one, while Lord Lumley faced the bailiff.

"Come, sir," he said cheerfully, "let us part friends: now that we are out of your hands, I beg your pardon for my jest."

"Very likely."

Lumley went in, and the door was bolted behind him. "He's a deadly beast, this bailiff," he said to the others; "he means mischief yet."

"We are in sanctuary," answered Kent, "and here we stay till Despenser comes."

"H'm—I have my doubts," said Salisbury.

"You Lollards always have," Lumley replied.

As time went by, voices were heard outside: a crowd was evidently collecting. The prisoners climbed upon benches and looked out of one of the great windows. The market-place was half-full of men armed and unarmed, and the bailiff stood in the middle arguing with a knot of burgesses.

"Ha! the sun is rising," said one of the squires presently; "Lord Despenser will be stirring now."

No one replied. John looked uneasily at his master. Was he, too, beginning to doubt?

Ten minutes passed: the mob grew steadily. A cart arrived, bringing a great balk of timber.

"Ah!" cried Salisbury, "I thought so; they are going to batter us."

"I wonder how long that will take?" said Tom, fingering his hilt.

At this moment a loud shout was heard. "Fire!

fire!" The cry came from the south-east corner of the market-place, where smoke was seen rising from the back of the houses.

"Lucky!" said someone.

"That's no luck," answered Lumley. "That's my priest: he stayed behind when we ran out of the inn. Good man! That will keep the wasps busy!"

"A priest all over," said Salisbury, "he has only maddened them."

It was quite true: a dozen or two of those more immediately concerned went off to extinguish the fire, but the rest ran with loud shouts to get out their battering-ram. The priest had only succeeded in destroying their scruples.

The prisoners stood upon the steps of the high altar and consulted.

"Shall we fight them here or make a rush for it when the door gives?" asked Tom. His eyes were bright again and his hands restless.

"Neither," replied Salisbury; "we must surrender before they break in."

He went quickly to the door: the ram had reached the entrance of the porch.

"Is the bailiff there?" he shouted. "We wish to parley with the bailiff."

"I am here," said the cold voice they knew; "I give you ten minutes' truce."

The door was opened, and the two parties faced one another. Tom moved to the front. "I am the Earl of Kent," he said. "To save you from com-

mitting sacrilege, we are willing to surrender—upon terms.”

The bailiff was neither young nor old: his face by daylight looked harder than ever.

“There are no terms for rebels,” he replied.

“I appeal to the king, your lord.”

The bailiff looked at the three leaders in turn: his eyes rested deliberately on Lord Lumley.

“I bid you to Blockham Feast,” he answered.

Tom closed the door. “Now what do you say?” he asked Salisbury.

“Surrender,” replied Salisbury,—“the axe is a decent end: I can’t die like a rat among a hundred dogs.”

“It will take them longer too,” urged Lumley, “and there is always the chance.”

Tom drew his sword and opened the door again; the crowd edged back as if expecting a charge.

“We are knights and peers of Parliament,” he said; “we have appealed to the king, and we are content to leave the rest to you. But we have servants here: what will you do with them?”

“They may have their horses,” replied the bailiff, “and an hour’s law on the road you came by.”

“At once?” asked Tom.

“No,” answered the bailiff, “afterwards.”

The three lords came forward and gave up their swords: no one asked for those of the squires. The crowd pressed eagerly round the whole party, but

the armed men soon formed a ring and drove them back. Axes were brought, and a confessor sent for from the abbey; the battering-ram was laid on three upturned stools to make a block.

"John," said his lord, "you must find my uncle, wherever he is."

John was surprised: he dared not name his mistress, but the look on his face betrayed his thought.

"My wife," said Tom, "is safe by now: say no more of that. My uncle is the king's only chance. I don't know what he has done since he left us; but if he has made terms with Henry, so much the better for Richard."

"I will go to him at once," said John. His voice seemed no longer part of him.

A monk was brought in: Kent and Lumley made their confession, but Salisbury refused, and knelt at a little distance by himself.

When they had all three risen, Tom held out his hand to the other two.

"Good-bye," he said, "I go first." He came over to John once more and kissed him. "Remember," he said, "that we are murdered, not attainted: Edmund should have my earldom."

He kissed him again and stepped resolutely to the block.

John fell on his knees and covered his face. At last down to the horrible abyss of frozen darkness where he crouched there came a faint sound of

a crowd shouting. He rose to his feet and pushed blindly towards the inn.

"My horse, my horse," he heard his own voice reiterating. No one replied or hindered him.

LXI.

ALL that day John rode in a stupor of grief, careless of danger, thoughtless of direction, unobservant of his horse's growing lameness, scarcely speaking a word to his companions. At starting next morning they reminded him that his lord's badge could serve him no longer for credit or protection: he carried it concealed about him till evening, and then sank it in the river beneath Abingdon Bridge.

The other squires had parted from him before this: to them he seemed to be a madman, riding directly to certain destruction. They left him to go his own way, and turning north themselves, fell straight into the hands of the pursuing army, which, as it happened, had been misdirected at Wallingford, and was now lying round Oxford.

King Henry was gracious over the news from Cirencester, but he declined to ratify the terms of surrender: the squires, after a short imprisonment, he sent to the scaffold with Sir Thomas Blount,

Sir Barnard Brocas, and a score of other knights and gentlemen.

John meanwhile stayed undisturbed at Abingdon, where no one asked him any questions. He was just a listless, pleasant-spoken gentleman, who bandaged his horse's legs himself, and took no interest in public affairs however near or thrilling. In his own thought he was a man with an errand, and life was bounded absolutely by his journey; but it was the journey of a ghost, a nameless and half-visible traveller passing through a country where he had once been some one, but was now no longer remembered even by his enemies. About such a journey there could be no haste or impatience, for he had lost all count of time.

It was some days later that the sense of time came back to him. He had left Henley in the early morning on his way to Marlow, and was riding slowly beyond Hurley Bottom when he came to the well-remembered fork where the road breaks off to Maidenhead Thicket. He stood a long time looking down it, as if even from there he could see the great bridge and his lord still fighting with the sunlight on his helmet. Then from Hurley the north wind suddenly brought a chiming of bells, and he knew that this was another Sunday than that Sunday of the bridge. For the first time, as he turned away, his face was wet with tears.

Four days later he was at Amersham; and he might have come to Berkhamstead on the next

morning, but by this time cunning also had returned to him. He would make for Langley first, and approach as though from London; he might hear, too, if Huntingdon had passed that way, as was most likely.

It was a bright still morning; the Chess glittered in the January sun as he crossed it below Latimer: he went slowly up the hill, and looked for the bridle-path to Flaunden. There it lay, remote and clear, vanishing at the crest of the slope into a mysterious little wood: the scene was all small and brilliant as the background of a picture. And now, while he stood looking at it, the figure of a man on horseback came out of the wood and moved downwards upon the path: he, too, was strangely clear, man and horse, and as he drew slowly nearer, John was certain that he knew him. Then his heart quickened, for he saw that chance had brought back to him a fragment of the past; no friend, but one who had been formerly a knight of Huntingdon's household, and had ridden away with him the night before the battle.

"Shelley!" "Marland!"—even on the open hillside they spoke the names with cautious intensity.

"Have you heard?" asked John.

"By God, yes," answered Shelley, with the gusto of a sensation-monger. "You did pick a hard bit to fall on! Not that we did any better!"

"What——?" faltered John; "I have a message for Huntingdon."

“Then it’s ‘hunting done’ for you,” said Shelley, still more cheerfully. He looked about him at the empty landscape. “We’re safe enough here. I’ll tell you how it happened: it was his fault, not mine. We were making a bolt for France: we got into Essex pretty easily, but there was some delay about a boat. We lay in a mill at Pitwell, as snug as possible, only Huntingdon would have wine. The vintner smelt a rat, and had the miller followed: we were collared as we sat at supper and hurried off to Chelmsford. Next day they took us—where d’you think?—to Pleshey: a regular hornet’s nest for poor old Huntingdon. There was the Duchess of Gloucester with the Staffords and young Arundel and half a dozen more to back her. She came out on to the steps, and Huntingdon went on his knees to her, but all she said was: ‘We never know, my lord, do we?’ and by God, sir, she said it as if she had something to hate him for. They took him away and shortened him in a field outside.”

The man’s every word was disgusting to John: he himself had never had any affection for Huntingdon, but this coarse picture of his miserable end was so heartlessly drawn, and seemed so horrible a travesty of his own lord’s death, that it soiled for a moment the dignity of that poignant farewell.

“Where are you going?” he asked abruptly.

“To the king,” replied Sir John. “I told young Arundel I could put him in the way of finding his property that Huntingdon had taken: so they gave

me a safe-conduct and letters commendatory. I think I'm all right." He slapped his saddle-bag, and mounted. "Where are you going yourself?" he asked carelessly. "Oh, never mind, if you'd rather not tell me. Well, good luck!" and he rode away.

John knew Henry better: the New June was forfeit, root and branch, and Shelley, the last flower of it, had but a few days more to bloom. The memory of it all was suddenly like rotten weeds before him: black to his eyes and sickening to his nostrils. Had he indeed been part of this? How often Nicholas Love had told him so.

Ten days later he dismounted before the guest-house of Mount Grace.

PART VI.

LIGHT IN THE WEST

LXII.

TIME is no comforter: he can but build a culvert over the stream. Below it, for him who stands to listen, the full waters of memory are still rolling; but above it the traffic of the world can now run secure and uninterrupted. By the aid of Time, therefore, one man will achieve forgetfulness, and call it comfort; another will learn only that his life must be henceforth divided—part shared cheerfully with all, part deeply hidden,—in the brief passage from what has been to what shall be.

From forgetfulness John had nothing to hope, and the other lesson he had not yet mastered. He sat in the Common Hall of Mount Grace, before a new-lit fire with no warmth in it—a face and figure so sorrowful in every line that the merest stranger would have known him at once for a man who had lost his way in life. He had come blindly, almost unconsciously, along a road he knew, to the only corner where he could be sure of finding a friend and a hiding-place; but beyond the moment of entering all was formless to his eyes. He knew little of the Carthusian rule, nothing of the exist-

ence to which Nicholas had returned, less than nothing of his own possible place in it. And now he was here, he sat frozen and inert, without purpose and almost without thought. A slow step approached, but failed to rouse him: it was unfamiliar even to his animal sense. At last he became aware of a white figure standing by him, and kind bright eyes looking down on him out of a small, round, withered face.

"Peace be with you," said the monk. "I am Father Edmund, the guest-master of this House. Will you be staying long with us?"

"I hope so,—I don't know," replied John. "Can I see Father Nicholas?"

"He is Prior now," said the old man, gently garrulous. "He succeeded me this year. But he will be in his cell now saying his office."

"Oh, I can wait," said John. "How long?"

"Well, dinner comes next."

"Perhaps I might be allowed to sit by him for dinner," John suggested.

"We all dine alone, except on Sundays and Chapter feasts."

"What do you do after dinner?"

"The reverend Prior has to see the Coadjuteur and the other officials."

John was silent.

"Then at noon there is the Third Ave Maria; after that——"

"Yes—after that?"

"We are free till Vespers for our own work. The reverend Prior is very busy: he is writing a book."

"I will venture to break in upon his book," said John.

Father Edmund shook his head. "No one from outside is allowed to enter the Great Cloister."

Grief had made John patient, but he frowned at this.

"Is there not a moment of the day," he asked, "at which your reverend Prior can speak to an old friend?"

The monk looked kinder still, but continued to enjoy the sound of his own voice.

"After Vespers," he replied, "there is supper, in our cells again, and then the Fourth Ave Maria, and after that the last office, and bed. It is a busy day; and then there is the night office too."

"Will you be good enough," said John, "to tell the reverend Prior that John Marland is here, and let him make his own arrangements for seeing me."

"I will ask Father Robert, the reverend Coadjuteur, to do so, if you wish." The tone was one of pleading, almost of remonstrance.

"I am afraid I do wish," said John a little stiffly.

Father Edmund shook his head with an indulgent smile.

"Very well, very well; but if every one thought to force a way in here——"

John almost laughed. "You need not be afraid,"

he said. "I have found it easier to take the king's castle of Windsor."

"I know nothing of castles or of kings," replied the monk, "but this is the Blessed Solitude of St Bruno;" and with that he glided gently from the room.

LXIII.

NICHOLAS entered almost immediately: at the sight of him John's heart seemed to break its cold iron bands and beat again with the pulse of life. But of the two friends, as they clasped hands and looked into each other's eyes, one alone was agitated: the monk's face showed no sign of any feelings but affection and surprise.

John saw this, but was silent: he brought news—such news as he had never brought to any hearer before; but something within him revolted against the crude ready phrases of everyday, and he could think of none better.

"You are welcome, John, but you are unexpected." The words were a question, and John was again conscious of the perfect tranquillity of the questioner: there was more behind it than mere ignorance. As for himself, dumbness still held him: he was looking at the truth, in his effort to relate it, more directly

than he had yet dared to do, and it smote him cruelly in the face.

"I am alone," he said.

If any one could have mistaken the significance of the words, it was not Nicholas Love.

"Here we are all alone," he replied.

Not the reply itself, but the calm unstrained confidence of the speaker's tone sounded in John's ears like a message of comfort; but it seemed to come from far off, like a shout of encouragement from a distant battlement, a city of refuge beyond his power to reach.

"Nicholas," he said, "Tom has gone."

His lips seemed barely to move, but he heard the words echoing as in a vault, loud and terrible. He stared at Nicholas, and thought he had missed his mark; the monk's face was still full of comfort, still had the old light in it—that strange mingling of irony and tenderness.

"Gone?" he replied. "You make me anxious." The dry humour of the voice, characteristic and familiar as it was, completed John's deception.

"Ah!" he cried, "if anxiety were all! It is too late to be anxious—he is gone, I tell you, gone; I was there, I saw the end."

"I understand," said Nicholas with gentle certainty of touch. "I did not mistake you. But I am still anxious—about the manner of his going."

Half the sadness fell from John's face: he looked up.

"You need not have been troubled about that," he answered.

"But I was," said the monk.

John looked prouder still: his head rose like a flower after heavy rain, but he found nothing to say.

"You were trying to make a prince of him," Nicholas continued. "It is a perilous process; I feared lest time might have failed you."

"It needed little time or trying," replied John, "he was born noble."

"Yes," said the monk, "of the house of Holland: with God all things are possible."

John smiled, a faint and reluctant smile.

"My dear Nicholas! But you may well say 'all things,' you have no idea of what he really was—you have been away so long. He was the king's right hand, the leader of them all; he fought the finest battle you ever saw, and then made a march half across England—he saved the whole army."

"But not himself," said Nicholas.

John made a quick gesture of impatience. "It was a chance—the merest chance!"

"Ah!" said the monk. "Chance!—you are out of my depth there."

"They trapped us—just seven of us, away from the rest."

"Then he died fighting?" asked Nicholas with real anxiety.

"There was no fighting," answered John regretfully. "They chose the axe: Salisbury was too

lordly to end with a scuffle. I was sorry myself, and I know Tom was too."

"You are too modest," said the other warmly. "You have done well, John, very well, and I congratulate you."

"Nicholas!"

"But think a moment," replied the monk. "Don't look at things upside down. What have you been working and I been praying for, these many years? And now you tell me that in spite of all the dangers and difficulties, this boy has lived with honour and died in a good cause, forgiving his enemies and at peace with God. Is that not true?"

"Yes," said John, "it is true; but he is dead all the same—you can't alter that."

"Perhaps not," Nicholas replied; "but you have gone far towards altering it yourself."

"I?" asked John. "What do you mean?"

"You have come here."

"You are wrong," cried John bitterly. "I have changed nothing, I have only prolonged the separation. I thought I was escaping: I will go back—they will make short work of my misery down there."

"Down there is one way," said the monk. "But I can show you a nearer one. Come with me."

He took John by the arm and led him out. They passed through a postern door into the court; it had been the garden of the old house and was still laid down in smooth turf, but the high bank of wood behind

was bare and hollow as John had never seen it, and beneath the wood, to the east of the house, now lay a range of buildings, dividing the plateau like a massive dam, and completely cutting off the northern half of it from view.

"There are changes here," said Nicholas, reading his companion's thought, "but this is still the place you knew: you must come farther yet."

They turned to the left and passed the west front of the church: the wall of the Great Cloister was before them, a bulk of solid stone, broken only by a heavy door of oak studded with iron. Even to the great strength of Nicholas the door yielded with ponderous slowness, and then, of its own weight, swung to again with a deep final clash. They stood within the Solitude of St Bruno.

"My brother," said the monk, "you have come from Time into Eternity: does not that alter the world for you?—look again."

John was silent: before him in the pale winter sunlight he saw a wide space of green lawn, stretching empty and level around a conduit of carved gray stone. On every side it was bounded by the cloister wall, above which rose at regular intervals the rigid outlines of the Carthusian cells.

"I see," he replied at last. "It is very different, but it is still a place where men live."

"And where they die," said Nicholas; "but in the life of Time, Death is the end; in the life of Eternity, it is only an incident."

John's eyes were fixed on the closed and silent door of a cell opposite, on the far side of the cloister.

"I am trying to understand," he replied; "but it is so shadowy. Eternity is nothing to me if I cannot find again what I have lost. You don't offer me that?"

"You have lost much," the monk answered, "but what you have lost was only a part: I offer you the whole. Your pain is temporary, but it will be repeated many times: my remedy is final. Drink of the water which I show you, and you shall never thirst again."

John did not move. "I trust you, Nicholas," he said, "but I am not sure that that is what I want. Even now it seems to me that I would rather thirst and go unsatisfied, than cease to care altogether."

"You will not cease to care," replied the monk. "You will cease to care about this or that; but for the one great good, in which all things are summed up and perfected, you will care as you have never cared before—supremely, without possibility of sorrow or fear."

There was no irony in his voice now, of himself at any rate he was speaking the plainest truth. John turned and looked at him with the patient weakness of a sick man—a look with no active belief in it, but with no resistance.

"You are very good, Nicholas," he said, "but surely you forget—I am not one of you. I have no right to live here."

"True, but you have no right to live anywhere else."

The cold shock of material fact roused John from his languor; this, at least, was a motive upon which he could act.

"What a fool I am," he exclaimed, "to stand arguing when there is no choice—forgive me, Nicholas."

The monk looked at him more tenderly than ever, and more ironically; here was a man who had hesitated over the life eternal, but who grasped at the life temporal as a matter of course.

"You will stay then—since there is no choice?"

"I will stay, most gratefully," John replied; "but I don't know how you will get over all the difficulties."

"There will be no difficulties," said the Prior. "The cause of our lord Richard is the cause of God."

LXIV.

NICHOLAS was right: there were no difficulties: the Fathers of Mount Grace at this time numbered only eight, and all of them were devoted to their founder and their lawful king. A formal Chapter was held: but whatever were the questions submitted to it by the Prior, they were decided unanimously and without debate—upon what principles John himself never asked or heard. He was an outlaw and an exile

from his own world: so long as the monastery granted him the asylum which he could find nowhere else, it was nothing to him whether he figured on its books as guest, novice, or *conversus*; the dress and daily routine prescribed for him were a necessary disguise, his mind—he told himself—was his own, the mind of a free man.

The Prior made no such error: he knew that where escape was impossible freedom could be but nominal, and even the independence of the mind was not likely to stand unimpaired by the practice of a rule so carefully planned as that of St Bruno, so potent to win over and dominate the human will. He knew then that the position he was creating was from the beginning not what John understood it to be. So much was inevitable: but he also foresaw that it would in the course of time become far more widely different from anything that John at present imagined or desired. If the clear eyes of his native honesty did not blink at the prospect, it was because he evidently believed that he was only passing off gold for brass upon a friend too short-sighted and too much troubled to know where his own advantage lay.

With the best of intentions, then, everything was made as easy as possible for John, and he was enabled to slip into his new groove without a shock, without even a momentary jar. The reverend Coadjuteur and novice-master, Father Robert, to whose especial care he was committed, showed something like genius

in the tact with which he dovetailed a past and a present undeniably discontinuous. There was so much kindly simplicity and so little appearance of premeditation about his method that it would be perhaps unjust to speak of it as a method at all: but it might fairly be said that from an observation of this good old monk's conduct it would be possible to sketch the outline of a thoroughly scientific treatment for use in cases of imperfect vocation.

Long afterwards this outline became faintly visible to John himself. He remembered how, among the duties and restrictions now laid upon him, the more novel were made of least account, while prominence was given—when occasion arose, but not otherwise—to those which were most likely to recall his old-accustomed service. The only real contrast—it was continually suggested to him—lay between the cruelty and disloyalty of the worldlings whose contact he had fled, and the selfless devotion of the community that was now his refuge: his soul was bidden to go daily about the walls of the eternal city, to mark well her foundations, her sweet order, her towers of lonely thought, and exhorted daily to bear a part in setting up with greater stateliness the impregnable bulwarks of her peace. Not only those ideas, but the very words themselves had their effect upon him: he gained a loftier view of his downfall and his deliverance, and found comfort in that which a year ago he would have scorned as an empty incantation.

Silent though he was, and evidently much occupied with thoughts which none could guess at, his docility and progress in the rudiments of religion were plainly visible to his new friends, and rapidly endeared him to them. Being themselves of gentle birth, they were able both to feel and to express a sympathy which was not only very welcome, but was actually more congenial to him than the loud friendliness of many of his fellows in the New June. He found, too, in the silence and isolation which were the rule during the greater part of the week, a relief from the strain of ordinary social life, where each of the casual meetings of every day goes to make up an expenditure of force in which personality seems at times to be running completely to waste.

Before long the greater tranquillity of his mind began to be reflected in his face. Father Robert, who with all his experience was by temperament an enthusiast, could not but believe in the imminence of a real conversion: after a fortnight he was confident of it, at the end of a month he was not sure that it had not already taken place. The Prior was wiser: he knew John better, and realised that what time has built, only long time can destroy and build afresh; he combated his Coadjuteur's optimism with a full quiver of his sharpest humour, and forbade any premature attempt to inquire into John's view of his own position. But he was himself unconsciously moved to hope: he began to see in his old friend something more than a refugee; beneath the hard

dry surface of his irony the desire of all these years was at last putting forth tender and sanguine shoots. He was always the happier for John's presence in church: and there were moments when a vision filled his eyes and his voice failed him. "He asked life of thee," chanted the rest, "and thou gavest him a long life, even for ever and ever."

LXV.

JOHN was indeed making progress, if not exactly in the direction supposed by his friends. Within a month he had recovered his nerve, both physical and moral: his mind rose as from a bed of sickness and began to look once more with clear sight upon the road before and after. One immediate discovery was the realisation of the full meaning of the Carthusian rule. After the kindly ministrations of the first few days he was left more and more completely to himself: he found in his cell a remoteness he had not conceived as possible—a solitude within a solitude.

The great principle of the Charterhouse is this twofold loneliness—isolation of the community from the world, isolation of each member from the others. Like a shower of drops falling through a clear windless void towards the pool of eternity, these souls shall pursue their flight in unison, but each untouched

and unhindered by the rest : to every one of them the universe shall be a shadow, his nearest fellow a mystery, and himself no longer a self, but a being already surrendered to be merged in the Divine.

First, then, the Order must be cut off from men. Father Edmund, when he said that no one from outside was allowed to enter the inner enclosure, spoke only half the truth. He might have added that no one who had once entered was ever allowed to pass outside again. For the Carthusian, so long as he still draws the breath of mortality, the wall of the Great Cloister is the boundary of the material world : there lies his every occupation, — his cell, church, chapter-house, frater, and library ; and even when on one day in the week he walks for an hour or two beyond the precincts, he is still surrounded by the whole community, and still, like an ambassador abroad, carries his native laws and limitations with him. He sees no stranger's face, hears no stranger's voice : even in church the guests of the monastery must sit silently in a place where they are invisible to him. Finally, he has no concern with the welfare of those outside : he is not, even for guidance, an element in their social life. The Carthusian must not preach, like a Franciscan or Dominican, or teach, like a Benedictine : though he cultivate his own garden with skill, he may not go afield and farm like a Cistercian. Even his religious offices are for the community only : outside the Great Cloister and its church he may

neither hear a confession, nor administer the last sacraments to a dying neighbour, nor bury him when dead, unless it is beyond possibility for another priest to be found. In such a case the rule is not only relaxed but reversed; the service required must be rendered at all costs; and it was no doubt in reliance upon the letter of this provision that Nicholas Love had been requisitioned for the education of the king's young nephews. His long and reluctant absence served the purpose of the Order: his knowledge of human nature was beyond that of his fellows, and he enforced the rule all the more strictly now because he had himself suffered so deeply from leaving its shelter for a time.

John saw then that in the House of Mount Grace he had reached an absolute asylum: he was no longer in the same world as the enemies who hated him. But the place bore a grimmer aspect when he realised that he was hardly less isolated from the men among whom he lived. The Carthusian is eternally alone. He may not speak with his fellow in private: meeting by chance in the cloister, each must draw his hood over his face, and pass without a word or a look. Even on Sundays and Chapter feasts, when dinner is served in the frater instead of in the cells, no talking is permitted: even during the brief hours of the weekly walk or other recreation, when conversation is enjoined, it must be general and on the most general subjects.

Kindliness and fellowship there may be upon the surface: but the life of the individual soul must be untroubled and un comforted, utterly and for ever untouched by any other soul of man.

LXVI.

FOR any one brought early under such a rule it must be, John began to think, a kind of living death, an entombment of all that makes up life as he had hitherto understood and valued it. Religious offices, work, recreation, the care of the body and the cut-and-dried intercourse of the community—these, in the perfection of the system, would be no more than the half-conscious acts of men living in a phantasmal world. The case was very different for one who, like himself, brought with him into the desert a whole universe of his own, crowded with clearly seen figures and ringing with unforgettable voices. It was hard to believe that he too might in the end find rest in this consecrated grave; for even in the sleep of death there must come to him dreams that no *requiem* could effectually charm away. To him, as to his companions, his surroundings might in the end become unreal; but the vivid life, the life within, would always be for him the past rather than the future, the warm, bright,

terrible life which he had left rather than any that hope could set before him.

This unworthiness, this predestined failure to learn the lesson of the Order, might have troubled him: but he soon perceived that even to his superiors the world of their experience was not in practice so wholly abandoned or forgotten. It would have needed a more remote Thebaïd than the Cleveland Hills to place Nicholas Love beyond all touch with the years which he had once shared with John Marland and his young lords. John remembered the tenderness of his welcome, the readiness with which his own long story had been received, the interest, none the less keen for being mainly spiritual, which Nicholas had betrayed in the fate of the boy whom he had taught and loved. Decidedly, though he was dead to the world, the world was not yet dead to him—he, too, was visited in his sleep by dreams.

These thoughts were further confirmed one afternoon in March, when John was summoned to wait on the Prior in the hour of leisure before Vespers.

He found Nicholas at work in his cell: before him on the table a book stood open, carefully propped in a wooden rest which appeared to have been made for it. To guard it further from being soiled during the long process of translation, the volume had been completely sewn up in a cover of brown holland; but John recognised it at a glance for the copy of St Bonaventura's Meditations which Gian Galeazzo

had given to Nicholas upon a memorable day at Pavia. For a moment, as his eyes rested on its clear Italian characters, the narrow walls of gray stone vanished and he saw another Charterhouse rising under a southern sky. The vision passed, but left his brain in a strange tumult; and the Prior's face, when he turned to him, confessed an agitation akin, he thought, to his own.

It may well have been so; but Nicholas had yet another cause to trouble his thoughts.

"John," he said in a slow restrained voice, "you know how earnestly I have desired to shelter you from all outside influences—from associations that could trouble your solitary blessedness. I have tried to keep the rule of our Order as strictly in your case as in my own. But even here there will come from time to time . . ."

He paused. John saw that there was news, news from outside, and he felt the unknown message knocking loudly upon the doors of his heart.

"We have some obligations which we cannot renounce. We are bound, for instance, to pray for certain benefactors, and, after their death, for their souls." He paused again. John made a murmur of assent. "I am in doubt at this moment whether we should pray for the earthly wellbeing of our sovereign lord, King Richard, or for the repose of his soul."

John's eyes flashed. "Why do you doubt?" he asked abruptly.

"A report of his death has come. It is said that his body was borne through the streets of London by order of his cousin, Henry of Lancaster. The messenger saw the procession, but he seems to suspect a trick of some kind."

"It is likely enough," said John bitterly. "We have nothing to complain of there. John Holland spread such lies broadcast: he swore to the people that Richard was marching with a hundred thousand men, and he dressed the Secretary Maudelyn up to act the part."

"Ah!" said Nicholas, "but by this time John Holland is doing what he can to atone for that. What I want is your judgment on the truth of the report; you know the Duke of Lancaster's character—or do you think the king's health——?"

"No, no," cried John. "It is not true, it cannot be true."

"Think well," said the Prior. "You and I have heard of men dying even more unexpectedly, by violence and treachery not less horrible than this would be."

John avoided his eyes. "I know," he answered in a lower tone, "but Henry is not quite like that. He would forge an Indulgence or a title to the crown, but not murder in cold blood. He is not——"

"Not man enough," said Nicholas in the dry quiet voice that John knew. "Very well," he continued, "that will do. We must decide one way or the

other, and we cannot ascertain the truth; it was your feeling that I wanted to know."

"I feel certain," replied John. "I cannot tell you why."

The Prior drew his sheet of manuscript towards him and took up his pen. "Then on Sunday we shall still pray for Richard, King of England."

John as he went out remembered a day when he had vowed to say that prayer every night of his life. The recollection continued to haunt him: lying awake an hour before dawn he heard or thought he heard, in the woods above the cloister, a voice that was like the voice of William the Singer.

LXVII.

THE question which the Prior had put into plain words was not the only one to which he sought—and obtained—an answer. He had in fact learned almost nothing about Richard, but a good deal about John: evidently, though for others the king might be buried for ever beneath the donjon of Pontefract or the high altar of Langley, for one at least of his servants his name was still a trumpet-call. The Prior sighed as he thought of his own hopes; so far his grafting had been a failure—the tree was throwing a wild shoot after all. He must sharpen

the edge of his vigilance and cut back this hardy growth once more: patience and the years were on his side, against him only the coarse original nature of the human sap. In the end he would get the heavenly rose he desired.

He might have done better to take an image from the March fires on the moor above. The spark had been rekindled in John's blood; it was but smouldering and creeping—hardly known or feared yet, even by himself, but ready for the first breath of living air to blow it into power. Heather once fired is ill stuff to trample out: small wonder if the moving winds of three years were at last too much for Nicholas and all his priests.

Even now he was on guard: but the first stirring of the flame was close at hand, and escaped his precautions: it was indeed his own most anxious forethought which brought about the mischief. On a cold, clear evening near the end of March, long after Vespers were over and the sunset had faded up the hill, long after every other inmate of the cloister was asleep, the Prior was still pacing his cell in great perplexity. When the full moon had risen and it wanted but half an hour to the call for the night office, he crossed the court and knocked upon the door of John's cell.

John took the sound for the excitator's usual summons, and wondered why the man was so long in lighting the lamp. When the knock was repeated he sprang from his pallet, and came out into the

living-room. It was lit only by a shaft of moonlight which slanted across the end of it: from the dusk nearer the door came the voice of Nicholas, like a voice in a dream.

"John, I have come to warn you of a danger. To-morrow there will be a burial-service here: among those who will attend it—those who are in the guest-house at this moment—there will be some who were once known to you."

John began to tremble in the cold night air. "Who are they?" he asked.

"If you are as self-willed as you used to be," said Nicholas, "you will repeat that question till I answer it: you will stand among the rest of us to-morrow, you will see and be seen, you will be in pain, perhaps in mortal peril."

The voice was measured and firm, but John could interpret the faintest inflections of it: he knew that Nicholas was anxious in no ordinary degree.

"If I were *not* so self-willed," he asked, "what should I do?"

"You would go out early and stay away all day—up on the moor—anywhere."

John reflected. "I wonder," he said at last, "why you gave me the choice—why you didn't simply send me out of the way without telling me?"

"No doubt," replied Nicholas, "that would have been more masterly."

The tone rang in John's heart: a hundred chords of memory chimed to it. But on the other side

memories were calling too: and sheer curiosity pricked him unendurably. Yet again he drew back as he realised how for his sake Nicholas had laid aside the authority of the Prior, the craft of the priest.

"I told you," said the dry measured voice once more, "because I dared not do otherwise: I feared you would find me out."

John knew that this was true, and the candour of it conquered him.

"You should have been a knight," he said, and added abruptly, "Very well, I will go."

A bell sounded from the church: he drew on his cowl and followed the Prior along the deep shadow of the eastward cloister.

LXVIII.

JOHN slept little that night, but when he rose to a still sunny morning he had no sense of fatigue—his nerves were only the more delicately set for pain or pleasure. His mind, as he left the Great Cloister, was a battlefield swarming with quick and violent thoughts, partisans in the struggle between curiosity and resolve. Outside by the porter's lodge he resisted a last wild onset: there on the right of the gateway lay the little door to the privy staircase of the guest-

house—the door which led to the separate chambers for visitors of rank. To know who was sleeping there now he would have stormed the entry in the face of anything that wore material armour. But he had given his word to Nicholas : and there was this too to console him, that welcome as a face from the past would be, it could never, he knew, be the face of his dreams : Margaret must be long ago safe beyond seas.

He turned out of the gate and along the front of the guest-house, hooded and deep in thought. Once past the long unfinished west side of the cloister, the choice of direction must be made : as he stood at the corner of the wall, with a new and pleasant sense of freedom, he caught sight of the roof of his own cell, and was seized with a wayward desire to view his narrow little home from outside. On his left lay the end of the ridge leading to the Hollow Dell : he went straight up it like a boy on a holiday, and came quickly to the spot where three years ago he had talked of the proposed founding of Mount Grace, and looked down upon its site.

Yes, it was here that he had rebelled against the thought of losing Nicholas ; just here that he had thrown himself face downwards among the bracken ; and there, under the trees on the edge, there he had looked for his friend again and found in his place—Margaret.

Where she had stood a figure was standing now—a figure like her, her very wraith, herself. For a

moment he was motionless : his whole vitality, as if dazed by a lightning-flash, seemed to wait and listen for the heart-shaking reverberation that must follow. Then, as he saw that he was unrecognised, a rage came upon him like the rage of battle. He strode forward, sweeping back his hood upon his shoulders and lifting his head as a wave towers before breaking. He heard her voice, as he swept up and overhung her and engulfed her bodily, fall from alarm and sharp surprise to a deep swirl of sobbing content. They spoke together, but their speech was no more than the outrush of the foam over the pebbles.

They drew apart at last, but settled down upon the edge of the bank hand in hand.

"So this is where you were!" she said, with a glance at his white dress.

"I had to take their livery," he answered, "but I am no monk."

"I like you in white," she said, looking fondly at him. "But what are you, then?"

"An outlaw—a dead man—a head and quarters, like any other loyal servant of the king."

"Don't be bitter," she entreated. "This cannot last—it must not ; you couldn't hide for ever."

"Where will you take me?"

She clasped his hand closer and shook her head.

"We must be patient: anything may happen. Who could have told, when they caught us at Liverpool, that we should be here to-day?"

He remembered a word of the Prior's.

"What brings you here? A burial? Yes; you are in black."

She could not speak: her eyes tried to tell him the unutterable.

"We have only just got leave," she said at last,—"leave, I mean, to take it down. It was on London Bridge, with the rest, until St Gregory's day. We asked to bury it here, because he was their Founder."

He clenched his teeth and looked away.

"Then they are friends now—your lady and Henry?" he said.

"Every one is her friend now; but she is no friend of theirs."

He longed to take up that "now" and see what lay beneath it; but he shrank from seeming to accuse Joan, and he shrank yet more from asking, even indirectly, whether Richard still lived or not. Before they parted he must dare that question; but from moment to moment he put it from him.

They talked of a hundred other things: of their hopes of pardon or protection, of Edmund's unexpected succession to the earldom, of Lord Stafford's power at Court: but all came round again to this, all seemed to turn inevitably about this one centre. Richard or Henry—which was the pole by which John must steer his perplexed and dangerous course? Yet still he could not force his anxiety to speak out: he dreaded lest the truth should drive the cloud-rack over his one hour of happiness.

Meanwhile Time was fleeting over them, invisible and swift as the wind. Down below white figures were passing along the cloister alley. The Fathers were returning from conventual mass; and by that, and that alone, he knew that he had been away two hours in fairyland. Then up the hillside came the sound of a bell,—a single, cold, dead note, not swung, but hammered out minute by minute. Margaret started to her feet.

"Oh, wait!" cried John. "You have half an hour yet. Tell me," he went on hurriedly, "I must know—what of the king? They said he had died."

"They said so. I cannot tell: no one knows."

"Forgive me," he said, taking both her hands. "I must know. Does Edmund believe?"

"Edmund—yes."

"And you?"

She did not answer at once. Her eyes were soft with a maternal tenderness as she looked at him. What—if she were to revive its hopes—what would the boyish heart of loyalty be daring next?

Nevertheless she decided for truth.

"I believe that Richard is alive: far away, perhaps,—in Scotland, they say,—but alive and well."

The wave rose more triumphantly than before: his eyes shone above her like spray in sunlight. Once more she lay in his arms and looked up at him with the surrender that sees so far beyond its conqueror.

Then the minute-bell called them again with the cold inexorable voice of separation.

He stood to watch her as she went down the slope. When she had disappeared round the angle of the wall, he drew his hood over his face and followed with long springing strides.

A quarter of an hour later the Prior began the Office for the Dead beside an open grave on the south side of the church. In the presence of two ladies and other mourners from outside the members of the Community were closely hooded: but every one of them was present, and some among them were deeply moved.

LXIX.

MARGARET came again with her mistress to Mount Grace in August; and twice more during John's long captivity. On each of these great days the Prior of his own accord sent John to the guest-house; he knew the bird was not yet tamed, but he knew, too, the impossibility of escape. To forbid such lovers to meet would have been to drive them to desperation; and though these glimpses of a single hour might very probably be undoing the patient work of the months between, yet they could do nothing, he trusted, towards taking John

back into the world. The usurper had refused Joan permission to bring her husband's body from Cirencester to Mount Grace: he was not likely to pardon the living while he still persecuted the dead.

So Nicholas did not despair; nor did he fight for John's soul any the less keenly because he fought according to the usage of chivalry rather than that of churchmanship. To the subtle among priests all methods are said to be good in their place: Nicholas acted as a master in the craft would have acted, but he did so by the sheer instinct of simplicity.

John accepted his kindness gratefully, without any thought of motives. For him Margaret's coming had changed everything. He had realised that his thoughts were becoming more religious, but he now perceived that they were still in the main not thoughts about religion—they had as little as ever to do with any kind of professionalism. He had learned to look at all things in the light of Eternity; but even so he hoped—how ardently—to achieve life to the full, to have it whole, not mutilated, not monastic, but with all its natural body parts and passions, the danger and the mastery.

This desire, this resolve, was only half conscious: it came of itself; but his councils with Margaret brought him insight of another kind to strengthen it. She was by allegiance an enemy, but still, as on the day when they first met, an enemy who would

accept no craven surrender. When he asked if Richard still lived, she had told him the truth of her belief, and always she kept alive in him the hope to strike another stroke for the cause that was not hers. Henry of Lancaster, it is true, had by this time disillusioned most of his friends; but if he had been all she once believed, she would still have sent her man to do a man's duty for the master he had chosen.

This was a real illumination to John: he got from her, what a man of his active temperament seldom gets, a sight of the thread upon which his own acts and fortunes had all been hung. He had been born and bred to loyalty: it was in his blood to devote his strength proudly to that which was greater than himself, and from the first the king's service had been his horizon of hope. William the Singer had pointed him to it when it was still far off beneath the rainbow: Tom and Edmund had led him straight towards it by a path he loved, a path in which even Margaret had helped to steady his steps. "Loyalty is your familiar spirit" was Nicholas Love's reproach in old days. Truly it had ended by driving him down the steep place, but he was more than ever sure that it was no devil: it had brought him near to destruction, but by not one stride that he regretted. If the deep waters really lay that way, it was Margaret's creed and his that the final plunge could not be too boldly dared. Upon that he had taken her promise: she would give him warning when the moment came near.

Neither of them doubted that it would come: all through the summer of 1402 the country was whispering, murmuring, babbling with gossip of Richard's return. He was here and there, he was at the head of armies, he was backed by Scotland and by France, his brother-in-law Count Waleran de St Pol was in arms before Calais. Henry's alarm was plain to see: a long list of executions added to the hate with which he was loading himself.

In the spring of 1403 Louis of Orleans defied Henry Duke of Lancaster to battle: the challenge was of course disdained, but it echoed beyond Severn, beyond Trent, beyond Tyne. The noise of it rang even through the refectories of the great religious houses; and came, last of all, perhaps, into the cloister of Mount Grace.

A long July day was going slowly out in wave upon wave of very faintly ebbing heat. The great court lay already half in shade, and since the Fourth Ave not a sound had broken the stillness except the monotonous murmur of ring-doves in the wood behind. John was standing, as he had stood so many times under the heart-breaking beauty of those summer evenings, in the doorway which led into the garden of his cell: he was looking up at the glory of evening sunlight which had already left his tiny high-walled plot, but was shining more and more brightly on the hillside above. It was seven o'clock; the loveliest hour of all was beginning, the hour at which, according to the rule of St Bruno, his waking-

day must end. One more moment of sunshine, and he would obey.

In that moment, before he moved, he knew that he was not alone. Footsteps had crossed behind him from the cloister alley to the interior of his cell. He turned down the narrow passage and followed into the bare little room.

There, as he expected, stood the Prior; but there also, by the Prior's side, stood Margaret's messenger, William the Singer.

LXX.

JOHN saw at a glance that he was in presence of two opposed forces; saw, too, that the contest was to be about himself. Inopportune, perverse though it was, his feeling instantly took sides with Nicholas against the intruder.

Nicholas was standing a little apart: he had never looked more solid or more serene. He also knew, of course, on what errand William was there: he knew that the crisis had come at last, the supreme moment against which he had all this time been laying up strength. It was no slight bond by which he held John: strand by strand he had twisted it himself, and though the trial had come sooner than he hoped, he could hardly have been blamed if he had

set the whole weight of his influence on the strain against anything this messenger could do or urge. A lesser man would certainly have been overbearing or ingenious.

Yet, as before, the Prior was something more than Prior: his instinct served him better than authority or cunning. He faced his danger squarely, and while his antagonist was still uncertain, still hesitating for an opening, he had seized the attack and gained the first advantage.

"The news is grave," he said to John; "there is a rising in the North and West on a considerable scale. You will know better than I can how it affects yourself, and you may wish to discuss it alone."

To the messenger, his going was no more than a relief: but John knew better what the alternative had been, what the effort must have cost.

"William," he said, when the Prior had disappeared, "that is a great gentleman."

"Ay," replied the other; "but there's no judging the covey by the cock."

John's hostility was on edge in a moment: this man had never failed to interest and irritate him. "What do you mean?" he asked sharply.

"One here, perhaps, and another, it may be, before the world's end: but for the rest there's as much light in such men's nolls as you might meet in a mist from morn to even."

"They are my friends," said John. "Let me hear your message."

William seemed conscious that he had made a bad beginning: for he too had a cause to plead. He was silent, and in the pause a quiet slow step was heard, pacing the empty cloister outside. John loved the sound of that step.

"Come!" he said, more sharply still. "What's your news?"

William's dark eyes turned imploringly upon him. "Though a fool blow it," he answered, "the horn is always the horn to a good hound. They are hunting at last: I bid you forward if you still love Richard."

The time had come then: how should John need bidding? Yet he was still perverse.

"Speak plainly," he said. "Who are 'they'?"

William's enthusiasm was lamed. "Glendower is out . . . and Mortimer."

John blew the names away like so much chaff.

"The Welsh!—They never hunt any trail but their own, and Mortimer is a boy, a puppet! Have you none better than these?"

Again William hesitated. "Douglas . . . and the Percies have risen—Worcester, Hotspur, and the old Earl, all three."

"The Percies! What?" cried John. "The Percies!—for Richard!"

"No: against Henry."

"Traitor against traitor: and how comes that?"

"When rent is spent," said William, "and men come to the bare bags"—he grasped the air with his hand—"force must be to fill them again."

"Aha! they have fallen out over the plunder!" John almost snarled with delight. "But a thieves' quarrel is not for me."

"Why not? I heard one say of his sword, 'Clean it may be, keen it must'!"

"Keen?—they are butchers' knives: but why should I touch them?"

"If Richard's men are all so white-handed, Richard will be hungrier yet."

John saw that he had overshot: to be honest, any blade would do to strike at the usurper. But he was not ready to acknowledge it.

"Very well," he said. "I will take counsel."

"Counsel?" William's eyes burned, and his low voice was once more stirring the tumult in John's blood. "Counsel is a word of the wise: but you and I were fellow-fools once, in a younger year."

"You forget," retorted John, "that in those days you cried out on the Court for a gang of wasters."

"Do I forget? My dreams are yet wild with it. Young men of yesterday, in gold and gules: spending of spicery more than it needed, wax and wine in waste all about, with dancing of damsels and mirth of minstrels—I forbid no man to be blithe some while, but the brightness of that world was the mirror of

sin. Their travail was in robbery and their honour in lordly names: their faith was an evil fellowship, and their manfulness stark murder."

The truth and untruth stung John together. "Ay!" he cried angrily. "So you were pleased to say: and this world here that you despise—of what is this the mirror?"

"Of madness, surely: there is nothing above mould so mad as that which is done against kind. Is not man's kind to live manlike among men, and fail after the flesh? This private peace, this hiding from hindrance, may never long endure, for all the rules in Rome: nay! if any thus lived his life to the end secure in self and lapped in loneliness, without trial or temptings, he might well say that he saw what was never yet seen, high Heaven unhung out of the hooks and let down earthwards at the bidding of a child of clay."

The music of this voice was terrible to John: it chanted his own thoughts aloud to him, and demanded an "Amen" which he had no right to refuse. Yet to speak it would be to give up Nicholas, and that he would never do.

"Go!" he cried with sudden vehemence. "Go! Go! You have done your errand, the rest is for me." He pushed him out into the cloister and shut the door.

Five minutes later the Prior returned.

"William is gone," he said. "I hope you do not think me wrong to have brought him?"

"No, no! not wrong," John replied. "But I could not think while he was here."

He could not think now: he had driven away the singer, but the song went on within himself. He knew well enough that his choice was made: it had never been in question from the beginning, though he had thrust from him the moment of confessing it. That moment was upon him now: and in the rebellion for which his blood was tingling he must strike the first and sharpest blow at his own friend.

"Nicholas!"—his hand reached out despairingly—"forgive me, forgive me."

The blow went home: Nicholas knew that he had lost.

"John," he said in his gentlest, least urgent tone, "you have no doubts?"

John's groan was almost a roar of pain. "Doubts! I have a thousand! I must side with traitors, I must trust my life to renegades; I have no certainty of Margaret's wishes, no guess of our chances of success."

The last ray of hope died out of Nicholas' face. In this heart that he loved he saw pride stirring, and prudence and affection: but not one regret, not one thought of that which must be left. The world was calling its own.

John knew what he had done: nothing remained but to end it. He began to pull off his cowl. At that Nicholas started suddenly, and strode across into the little oratory.

When John came down again from his upper room, dressed once more in the fashion of his old life, the cell was empty. He stole out into the cloister: for all the immeasurable gulf of time that he had crossed, the glow of sunset was not yet gone from the hill.

At the cloister door stood Nicholas, impenetrably serene and kind.

"You cannot go on foot," he said.

"I must." John's hoarse voice was sackcloth to the other's satin.

"Oh! no," Nicholas replied. "William has left his horse for you."

The horse was there, outside the gateway, obvious, tangible, real, a thing that John could speak of.

"But how is William going himself?" he asked as he mounted.

"I do not know," answered Nicholas with the accent that was most his own. "Perhaps he is not in a hurry."

John saw little of his road: but he was in York by morning.

LXXI.

SOUTHWARD, southward, southward! That way lay battle and allegiance, and love or death,—the end at any rate of delays and uncertainties; but first and above all, battle, something to do, something to win

or lose, some one to grapple with. John's eyes turned again and again, at every halt, to the string of pack-horses, piled with arms, that brought up the rear of the little company. One night, when no one could see him, he drew his sword and poised it; many times he recalled the arrow flight at Maidenhead, and felt a fierce joy that he would find some of the incomparable Cheshire bows with Hotspur.

He winced a little whenever that name came to mind; the Percies, he felt, were no leaders for a loyal man. They had been among Richard's cruellest and most mercenary enemies, and now that for equally sordid reasons they had turned against the hand that hired them, their violence and self-seeking were almost more offensive than before. In the baseness of an enemy you may find strength for yourself, from the baseness of an ally you can get nothing but harm. Thankfully, John remembered that Hotspur was not supreme; Glendower was a greater commander, and Douglas, it was commonly said, a gallant heart worthy of his name.

The men with whom he rode were the more to his liking because they were not of the Percy faction, though they had been raised by Northumberland to reinforce his son. They were Yorkshiremen—many of them from Cottingham and Kirby Moorside, old tenants of the Hollands, and proud of their late lord. Not a man among them doubted that they would satisfactorily avenge him upon the usurper, and that King Richard would then return from some craftily

chosen asylum to receive his own again at their hands. They took John's unlooked-for reappearance as a case strongly in point, and scoffed at the claims of young Mortimer, whom Glendower and the slippery Northumbrians were proposing for the Crown. John heard them with infinite comfort, and believed quite half of what he heard; they were at any rate magnificently mounted, they rode like centaurs, and were as keen as terriers for a fight.

The fight came suddenly. On the evening of the 19th they reached Chester, to find that Hotspur had moved on Shrewsbury the day before. King Henry was reported to be raising levies in Lord Stafford's country, and John, after a good march on the 20th, started next morning from Wem with every expectation of a short day's work for his final stage.

At eleven o'clock he was riding quietly towards Shrewsbury, now only three miles distant, when the lazy July air was sharply pierced by the sound of a trumpet. Another repeated the call still nearer at hand, and was answered faintly by yet another in the direction of the town. He looked round him: if he was mistaken, so were his terriers,—every one of them was growling with ears pricked and bristles set. In five minutes the whole party came galloping into the left wing of Douglas's command.

They had arrived to the minute: two or three hours of parleying had just ended in a jangle of pot against kettle,—Thomas Percy taunting Henry with being a man whose word none could trust.

Henry's people were chafing to repay this insult, and their attack was only delayed by the difficulty of the position: they had to manœuvre among a tangle of narrow lanes and small enclosed fields, made more impassable by a fine crop of standing peas. Above them, on a large stretch of rising ground from which the hay had been all carried, their enemies awaited them at great advantage.

John, while his armour was unpacked and buckled on, looked down the slope with immense satisfaction. Below him the Cheshire bows were already taking post on both flanks: above, the men-at-arms were lining out along the whole position; they would be able to charge downhill when the enemy's front had but half cleared the labyrinth of hedgerows and pea-sticks. Disadvantages he also marked: the little army was very short of billmen for the hand-to-hand fighting; it was liable to be outflanked by the enemy's superior numbers, and Glendower's banner was nowhere to be seen. He had just captured Carmarthen, some one said, and though urgently recalled, he could not be back in time.

But nothing could dim the scene for John: Douglas himself as he passed along the front inquired his name and commended him for coming in time. John asked if he was in his right place—he felt bound to confess that he had been sent to join the Percies. "Ay, man," answered Douglas, "ye're wrang; but I'll hang ye if ye move a yard." A knight who followed him explained that the brunt would fall

on this part of the line; for the Constable himself was leading the enemy's right, and the usurper was reported to be with him, dressed in the lions and lilies he had stolen from Richard.

"The Constable": a question was on John's lips, but he swallowed it. A monk might ask who was Constable of England, a soldier could not. He looked for the banner opposite: it was just coming into range, and as the sun lit up its square of gold and showed the bold red chevron of Stafford, the blood rushed back to his heart like the bore of the tidal wave up Severn. A moment later the stream of thought turned again to its course, brimmed and glittering with a full flood of resolve. The royal lions, thought John in this moment of inspiration, were a mark for his betters, and Douglas the man to hunt them; but the Constable should be his own. Once at Pleshey, and again at Windsor, Tom had honoured him with the charge of Lord Stafford's safety: in the coming victory he could still be serving the dead. Prisoner or no prisoner, ransom or no ransom, Lady Joan's brother should not be touched by any hand but his own. He gave an order very quietly to the men behind him, and felt even happier than before.

Meanwhile the archers below were already at work; and sad work it was for the Derbyshire men who came against them. In two successive attacks the red cocks of Cokaine and the golden scallop shells of Wendsley were shot to pieces and sank

in the green morass of peas. But the Stafford archers succeeded in establishing themselves here and there among the hedges, and their shooting was good enough to cover a third advance. The Cheshire men, too, by continually extending leftwards to save the flank, had opened the centre, and Henry's men-at-arms began to pour into the gap.

The crisis had come: trumpets were sounding all along the slope. Before they were silent Douglas and the two Percies rode out in front of their heavy cavalry, with visors lowered, and standard-bearers close behind them. John saw, in the moment before the line moved off, that every available man was in the charge: there were no supports—the fortune of the day was upon a single throw. He remembered, too, as he lowered his own visor, that he was wearing neither badge nor surcoat: for him a fall would mean a nameless death under the nearest billman's knife. His pulse bounded as he struck spurs; but his eyes had never been clearer in his life.

Time and his senses no longer seemed to keep their accustomed relation: he saw an infinite number of things happen while he galloped a bare quarter-mile. On the right Worcester was down, Hotspur was engulfed: nearer to him he saw Douglas meet a phantom of King Henry full face, smash it, coronet and all, with a single stroke and pass on towards another royal figure, entrenched behind a double

line of men-at-arms. This was the real king, for there was Lord Stafford too, under his own banner, covering his master.

In this last moment of the race John led his men sharply inwards, converging with Douglas upon the same file of the bodyguard: the shock carried the two leaders through, a man or two more struggling after them. But John's horse was dying: as it sank he found that his right arm would no longer serve him. He rolled off on to his left side and was up again in time to see Douglas fall: Stafford was bending from his saddle in a furious effort to withdraw his sword from his fallen enemy: from the mellay a rider on a great bay horse was charging down on him, hotly pursued in turn by three men-at-arms.

With his sword in his left hand and visor open, staggering and half-dazed, John stood up to defend Lord Stafford against his own ally. "No! no!" he shouted desperately, "no!"

"You fool!" cried Swynnerton's unforgotten voice. The great bay rose over John and trampled him: the rider struck once at Stafford, crashed through into a lane, and was gone beyond pursuit.

John heard voices close beside him. "They are both dead, Sir," one was saying.

He acquiesced, and the world went out.

LXXII.

JOHN had acquiesced too readily: he had a sword-cut, a broken arm, and several hoof-marks, but he was not nearly dead. In a comfortable lodging in Shrewsbury, and under the hands of the king's surgeon, he even began to mend.

What was to become of him he did not know: though he had speculated furiously all through his first night of fever. A mood of indifference followed, and then one of almost luxurious content. But this, too, gave way to realities: the cheerful bone-setter, mistaking him for a hero of the bodyguard, talked lightly of the vanquished and their well-merited end—Vernon, Venables, and Lord Worcester had all been beheaded. To silence him John turned on his pillow and closed his eyes: even so the market-place at Cirencester was too vividly before them.

On the third day Lord Stafford's wife and sister came from Lichfield.

Next morning the surgeon was still more cheerful. "I have brought some one to see you," he said as he entered John's room, and being as kindly as he was indiscreet, he stayed to witness the meeting.

John was a little embarrassed: but Margaret was here mistress in her own house. It was not until she had knelt by John's couch, and kissed him like

a wife and scolded him like a mother, that she even remembered the bystander. "I am grateful to you for your care of him," she said cordially. "And now I think we can release you for to-day."

John had no hand that he could give her: she drew a chair up close, and sat opposite, looking into his eyes.

"You poor John," she said at last, "what have they done to you?"

"Caught me," he replied. "The question is what they are going to do to me."

She was silent: she looked down and the light went from her face.

"Margaret," he said softly, to break her reverie, and then when she raised her eyes, "I am sorry, darling, I am sorry. I took the risk wilfully and wrongly, and you must forgive me. Whatever happens, you must be able to remember that I confessed and you forgave me. You see I thought, when you sent no message with your news, that you were perhaps caring too much for my own safety."

Her lips began to tremble. "I was," she said. "I did it on purpose: I hoped you would not go: it was my selfishness—as if your loyalty did not come first."

"I don't know why it should," he answered quietly. "Perhaps that is a kind of selfishness too: there is your king, you know, as well as mine. Why should it be yours to give way?"

Her eyes flashed like crystal daggers. "He shall, he shall," she cried, "or I will be a rebel myself."

That moved John to compunction. "After all," he said in a lighter tone, "he has treated me well so far, and I dare say he will never think of me again."

She was all sober sense in a moment. "Oh! you are wrong: he is thinking about you now—I know it. At first he meant to reward you."

"For trying to save Stafford?"

"Yes: he thought you were one of his own men. But someone was there who had seen you at Flint."

"And now?" His pulse quickened secretly.

"Now," she answered with decision, "he has me to deal with."

She rose and bent over him. "Do you think you owe me anything?"

"Everything."

"I will take it: I can do better with it than you would."

She lingered over her going: then "Remember," she said, "I am taking all you have—your life, your lands, your name, your arms, and your honour."

"Oh! my honour?"

"That has always been mine—always."

She was gone more than an hour. When she returned she took her place again in silence. He, too, hung back from the supreme moment, looking not at her face, but at the roses and jessamine in

her hand. She tossed them upon the couch and threw herself upon her knees again, pressing back his hair from his forehead with both hands, as if to see better what she possessed.

"I keep you," she cried. "I keep you—you are mine!"

"That's good," he said quietly, to cheat the folly in his blood. She, too, was moved to play a little with her triumph.

"Wait," she answered; "you have not yet heard what the bargain is. The king grants and confirms to me, Margaret Marland, all that his prisoner or rebel, John Marland, holds of him *in capite*, with the name and arms properly thereto belonging, and the manor of Gardenleigh, in the county of Somerset. I, Margaret Marland, surrender to him, the king, all my right, title, and interest in the manor of Eastwich, in the County Palatine of Chester, with the arms of Mells, and the homage of my said husband during his life."

John started, but she held up her hand and went on, "Saving always his fealty to Richard, King of England."

His astonishment was almost fierce. "You said that, Margaret?—and what answer had he to that?"

She dealt the blow as tenderly as she could, watching him with pain in her eyes.

"He leaves you free to obey any order of King Richard's which . . ." John turned pale as she

hesitated, "... which you shall at any time hereafter receive from him in person."

The mist of wilful hope passed from before his eyes. "Richard is dead: Richard is dead," he said silently, as if to something deep within himself, and from the depth something answered him, "You knew it."

"Yes," he said aloud. "I knew it long ago: Edmund knew, and I could never have mistrusted Edmund."

She made no answer; but as her eyes were close enough to mirror his face, so her mind reflected his thought, spoken or unspoken. At Edmund's name they went back together to the past: they looked for the England of old days, and saw it as those who return after an earthquake see their home in ruins. John had long borne this sight, but on Margaret it struck with fresh poignancy.

"Darling," she cried, "it is a terrible world: I have brought you back to a desert."

"What was Mount Grace but a desert?"

She shook her head. "You were better off with Nicholas—your soul, I mean."

He smiled as one who hears a pardonable error. "Nicholas is a dear fellow, but he spoke the truth about himself when he told me once that life terrified him. What he and his like really desire is not to make life better, but to escape from living altogether."

"From the evil of living," said Margaret wistfully,

“and there is evil enough. Is it not true that man needs a cloister—a quiet place apart, where he can always find his best self and think of all things purely? Forget me for a moment, and confess.”

John laughed at her, — his happiest laugh. “Dearest, you are right! The soul does need a cloister, but—to forget *you*! No! listen to me: let me tell you what I know: I say nothing against monks, but for a man there’s only one safe place in this world . . .”

Her eyes shone above him as he paused.

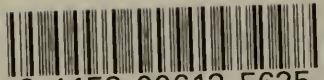
“A man’s cloister is his lady’s heart.”

So these two, after grief and danger and long separation, began at last their life together. In that dark and perplexed time it was not perhaps the least part of their good fortune that it must be a life of obscurity and quiet. From their remote corner of the West they heard the long storm of rebellion die out in battle after battle, like the reverberations of more and more distant thunder: when the sky cleared and the new age began, the face of England was to their eyes wholly changed. Yet among so much that was alien, some dear possessions, some living friendships still remained to them, even in the world of time. They went again and again with Joan to Mount Grace: they found Nicholas Love, as always, more human than the rule he professed. Edmund, too, they kept for a few memorable years, and they stood at last in

the brilliant crowd which saw him wedded to his Lucia, before an altar heaped high with the Visconti gold. Prouder still, in spite of its sorrow, must have been that day, a few months afterwards, when they heard of his heroic death, achieved in a forlorn hope from the sea against the pirate castle of St Brieu.

THE END.

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